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**Walking an earthly path; everyday Islam in Bougouni, a town of  
southwest Mali**

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Anthropology**

**2013**

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### **Declaration for PhD thesis**

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## Thesis Abstract

Based on 18 months of fieldwork in southwest Mali (October 2008 - April 2010), this study of everyday Islam focuses on 'ordinary' Muslim migrants of rural origin who have moved to build better lives in the fast-growing town of Bougouni, the crossroads of southwest Mali. The thesis explores the importance to them of being both successful *and* good Muslims in contemporary Mali and stresses the triple Mande-Islamic-French legacy shaping local life in southwest Mali.

Moral evaluation of success takes place within contexts that range from the globalisation of commercial circuits, via sub-Saharan regional factors, to local social ethics, status and traditions. Its public character is facilitated by the openness of street life found in urban Mali. Against the background of a liberal and democratic shift (associated with a new freedom of the press and association, and the reinforcement of *laïcité* brought about by the coup d'état of 26 March 1991), forms of public life in the Third Republic of Mali are characterised by outward signs of the practice of a generic Islam which express both piety and mundane success. Wealth and consumption are understood as indexes of social status and of blessing. While the logics of the market have reinforced the links between prosperity and religion, the values of the Mande world are still embodied locally in the exemplary figures of the noble Muslim and the blessed child, and in the tensions between display and intention, as well as in contrasts between daytime activities and night life that connect morality to issues of power, secrecy and occult in Bougouni. For many Malians, this notorious centre of *Bamanaya* religion remains a marginal place, its inhabitants uncivilised, bad Muslims and expert in occult manipulation.

This study of everyday Islam demonstrates that meanings of Muslims life in Bougouni stem from complex interplay between modern forms of distinction and prestige, older processes of identity and sociality, and Mande ideas of 'humanism' (*hadamadenya*) that occur in southwest Mali.

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In memory of my host father, Cheick Kader Diabaté (1947 – 2009)



## Style sheet

- Text in Calibri 11 pt., chapter title in Calibri 14 pt., sub chapter title in Calibri 12 pt., and footnote in Calibri 8 pt.
- Chapter title in bold character, line spacing 1.5 lines
- Text full out undertitles; inset paragraphs otherwise
  
- Quotation in inverted comma ('X')
- Long quotation in Calibri 10 pt. and with separated insert and paragraph
- Quotation within quotation in double inverted comma ("X")
  
- Arabic, *Bamanankan* and French words in *italic*
- Capitalization for persons and places
- Referencing in Chicago Manual of Style (Author-Date: page). Bibliographic conventions (for authored books, journal articles and essays in edited books, also archives)

## Glossary of Bamanan, French and Arabic words used in text

Orthographic conventions,

ŋ = [ng]

ɲ = [ny]

ɛ = [è]

ɔ = [ò]

c = [ch]

aa, ee, ii (...) = long vowels

an, en, in (...) = nasalised vowels

Words in plural are written with a 'w' at the end. For instance *denw* means children. The structure of compound words may be stressed by '.' For instance *Bamanankan* becomes *Bamanan.kan* so as to indicate that its structure is composed of *Bamanan* (group identity) and *kan* (language).

### Bamanan

<i>arijene</i>	heaven
<i>baara</i>	work
<i>baarakalo den</i>	monthly worker
<i>Bamanankan</i>	bambara language
<i>Bamanaya</i>	to be <i>bamanan</i> , <i>bamanan</i> religious practices
<i>balani</i>	itinerant discotheque
<i>balimaya</i>	brotherhood
<i>banji</i>	palm wine
<i>baraji</i>	religious award
<i>barika</i>	physical strength, blessing
<i>baya</i>	sermon
<i>bogolan</i>	traditional cotton cloth dyed with natural vegetal/muddy techniques
<i>boli</i>	object-power

<i>bonya</i>	respect
<i>cegana</i>	single man
<i>cekɔɔba</i>	old man
<i>cigarettitigi</i>	seller of cigarettes
<i>daamu</i>	happiness
<i>dabali</i>	evil spell
<i>daga</i>	traditional cooking pot
<i>dakan</i>	destiny
<i>danga</i>	curse
<i>danaya</i>	trust
<i>danaya mɔɔɔ</i>	man of trust
<i>danbé</i>	honour
<i>danga den</i>	damned child
<i>den</i>	child
<i>diine</i>	religion
<i>djine</i>	jinn, spirit
<i>dijennatige</i>	world, univers, life
<i>donkilida</i>	song
<i>dubabu</i>	blessing
<i>duguda siri/djine</i>	protector spirit/jinn of a village/town
<i>duguma kalan</i>	traditional Islamic education based on learning sura by heart
<i>dunan</i>	foreigner
<i>dusu</i>	heart, courage, anger
<i>face</i>	legacy of the father
<i>faantan</i>	poor man
<i>fato</i>	madness
<i>fɛɛɛkɛla</i>	seller
<i>foyé</i>	nothing
<i>fula</i>	fula
<i>fulakan</i>	fula language
<i>fura</i>	medicine
<i>furunafolo</i>	dowry
<i>garibu</i>	Islamic student who does begging
<i>garijege</i>	luck
<i>gingin</i>	nocturne raptors

<i>gwa</i>	wide family dominated by the oldest man of the highest kin branch
<i>hadamaden</i>	human being
<i>hadamadenya</i>	to be human, human solidarity, social relations, politeness
<i>hakili</i>	mind, intelligence, memory, opinion, wisdom
<i>hεεεε</i>	peace, happiness
<i>hɔɔɔn</i>	noble (caste)
<i>hɔɔɔnya</i>	nobleness (attitude)
<i>jama</i>	crowd
<i>jamu</i>	surname
<i>janfa</i>	betrayal
<i>jatigiya</i>	hospitality; host-foreigner bonds
<i>jeli</i>	praise singer and bard (people of castes)
<i>jeneya</i>	adultery
<i>ji</i>	water
<i>jo</i>	fetish
<i>jogo</i>	attitude, character
<i>jon</i>	slave
<i>jugu</i>	enemy
<i>juguman</i>	bad, nasty, evil
<i>juguya</i>	badness, nastiness, evilness
<i>juru</i>	credit, rope
<i>jurumu</i>	sin
<i>kabako</i>	surprising
<i>kafo</i>	political unit ( <i>canton</i> )
<i>kamalen</i>	young unmarried man
<i>kamalenba</i>	philanderer, womanizer
<i>karamɔɔɔ</i>	teacher, master
<i>kεεεya</i>	jealousy
<i>ko</i>	problem, difficulty, and affair
<i>koloni</i>	shells divinatory practice
<i>kɔngɔ</i>	hunger
<i>kɔɔɔε</i>	magic poison
<i>kuma</i>	word, parole
<i>kunbenyεε</i>	crossroads

<i>kungo</i>	bush country
<i>laada</i>	custom
<i>limanyia</i>	faith
<i>makari</i>	pity/compassion
<i>maloya</i>	shame
<i>miiri</i>	thought, idea, reflection
<i>monekun</i>	business asset
<i>mɔriɛ</i>	Muslim scholar in occult sciences ( <i>marabout</i> )
<i>mura</i>	cold
<i>musogana</i>	single woman
<i>musokɔɔba</i>	old woman
<i>naafigi</i>	snitch
<i>nataba</i>	cupidity, greed
<i>nkalon</i>	lie
<i>numu</i>	blacksmith (people of castes)
<i>ɲamakala</i>	people of castes
<i>ɲegoya</i>	selfishness
<i>ɲɔɲɔndeme</i>	solidarity
<i>ɲin</i>	friend
<i>ɲuman</i>	good, nice, pretty, handsome
<i>ɲɔɲmi</i>	pancake
<i>sababu/sabu</i>	cause, reason, motive
<i>saraka</i>	offering, sacrifice
<i>silame</i>	Muslim
<i>silameya</i>	Islam
<i>seli</i>	Muslim praying
<i>seliba</i>	Tabaski (Muslim celebration)
<i>senekela</i>	farmer
<i>seri</i>	traditional semi-liquid meal made of mush and milk
<i>shefantigi</i>	tea-coffee-omelette shops
<i>soma</i>	sorcerer
<i>somaya</i>	sorcery
<i>subaga</i>	witchcraft
<i>sugu</i>	market
<i>sunguru</i>	young unmarried woman

<i>sunguruba</i>	'bitch', prostitute
<i>sunkalo</i>	Ramadan
<i>teriya</i>	friendship
<i>tɔ</i>	traditional meal made of millet and gumbo sauce
<i>tɔgɔ</i>	name
<i>tɔɔɔ</i>	suffering, harm, pain
<i>ton</i>	association
<i>tubabu</i>	white people
<i>tulon</i>	joke
<i>tunga</i>	adventure, journey, foreign country
<i>waajuli</i>	public preaching
<i>wara</i>	<i>bamanan</i> spirit cult
<i>wari</i>	money
<i>wɔkɔlɔ</i>	small jinn of the countryside
<i>wɔtɔɔtigi</i>	carter
<i>wurudi</i>	Islamic rosary
<i>yuguyugu</i>	cheap cloth, frippery
<i>zana</i>	proverb

## **French**

<i>boîte</i>	night club
<i>boubou</i>	Traditional African luxurious cloth with fabric of wax or bazin
<i>broussard(e)</i>	countryside men/women
<i>brousse</i>	bush country
<i>causerie</i>	chat
<i>charlatan</i>	conman
<i>cultivateur</i>	farmer
<i>dibiterie</i>	butcher shop
<i>féticheur</i>	<i>bamanaya</i> practiser
<i>gargotte</i>	small restaurant
<i>grin</i>	informal spot for sitting, drinking tea and discussing
<i>griot</i>	praise singer and bard (people of castes)
<i>maquis</i>	local wine/beer bar

<i>marabout</i>	Muslim scholar expert in Islamic esoteric sciences
<i>médersa</i>	French/Arabic modern school
<i>friperie (yuguyugu)</i>	cheap cloth, frippery
<i>pagne</i>	loincloth
<i>sucrerie</i>	soft drink
<i>tontine</i>	women banking association
<i>vaurien</i>	rascal, villain

## Arabic

<i>Allah akbar</i>	God is great
<i>Al-Fatiha</i>	the opening chapter of the Qur'an
<i>jihad</i>	holy war
<i>ijma</i>	Islamic consensus
<i>mu'min</i>	the believer, the true Muslim
<i>sura</i>	chapter of the Qur'an

## Abbreviations

AMUPI	Association Malienne pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam
DEF	Diplôme d'Etudes Fondamentales
CMDT	Compagnie Malienne de Développement du Textile
CSCOM	Centre de Santé Communautaire
IFM	Institut de Formation des Maîtres
UDPM	Union Démocratique Populaire du Mali

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## Introduction

‘Mon père avait raison. La vie est un combat. Ma mère avait raison. Il ne faut jamais jamais baisser les bras’ (Madou, 37 years old, electrician).<sup>1</sup>

In Mali, every day people arrive in middle-sized towns such as Bougouni (or *Banimonitie*<sup>2</sup>) so as to build their lives. Aïcha comes from a village near Bankass in the Dogon country of northern Mali.<sup>3</sup> When I met her in 2009 she had lived away from her husband for a year. She left the village soon after their marriage and moved to Bougouni where she worked as housemaid to a better-off family; her little savings contributed to pay back her wedding costs. Madou grew up in a village near the Ivorian border. He moved to Bougouni several years ago to seek money in town. As he told me: ‘*Ni jama bɛ, wari dɔɔni bɛ*’ (Money is where the crowd is). After years of hardship, he eventually managed to learn the trade of an electrician; he got married and settled down with a family. Urban migrants in Mali struggle to make a livelihood and to move forward in life. They often raise ‘the issue of money’ (*wariko*) as the main hurdle as well as the principal door leading them towards a successful life.<sup>4</sup>

Since 2000 I have embarked on several sojourns in the majority-Muslim (90%) country of Mali for a total of 27 months.<sup>5</sup> During my stays I came to recognise the importance of worldly success in people’s lives, their aspiration to be successful, moral Muslims. This observation constitutes the main theme of this ethnography based on 18 months of fieldwork (December 2008 – April 2010) in the town of Bougouni in the savannah of southern Mali. It analyses how the meanings of Muslim life are shaped in the struggles of everyday life and at the meeting places between pious concerns, mundane schemes, and ideas of a successful life in Mali. By recognising the constitutive importance of earthly success and religiosity in building people’s lives in Mali, my intellectual curiosity resonates with *The protestant ethic and the spirit of Capitalism* in which Max Weber pioneered the study of the ‘relation between practical life and a religious motivation’ ([1905]2002, 45-46).

In line with the analytical scope of Weber’s seminal book, recent studies of Muslim life stress the linkages between neoliberalism and religion. By referring to ‘*l’Islam de marché*’, the political scientist Patrick Haenni explores the emergence of a new religiosity, based on recent processes of urban distinction and media-visibility found into the Muslim world, which is

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<sup>1</sup> ‘My Dad was right. Life is a struggle. My Mum was right. One should never give up’.

This quotation of Madou is a famous tune of a song called *Mon père avait raison* written by Alpha Blondy and released in 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Banimonotie means between the rivers *Ba* and *Mono* in *Bamanankan*.

<sup>3</sup> To maintain the privacy of my informants, I have changed their names (except for public figures, such as artists, politicians and historical figures) and the names of their neighbourhoods.

<sup>4</sup> All amount of money in francs of fcfa refer to the West African CFA franc or XOF (ISO 4217 code); £1 was worth roughly 800 West African CFA francs in 2010.

<sup>5</sup> On further statistical details about the religious composition of the inhabitants of Mali, see Leiniger (2009).

promoted by new religious entrepreneurs who insert neoliberal values in Islamic discourses (Haenni 2005). Following Sloane's findings about Malay business life (1999), the anthropologists Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella (2009), through an investigation of activities of Muslim entrepreneurs between India and the Gulf, illustrate the meshing between religious orientations and economic principles found in contemporary Muslims' subjectivities. Focusing on the spiritual reform movements that are active in state-owned companies in Indonesia, the anthropologist Daromir Rudnyckyj explains how their training programmes aimed to produce better Muslims as well as better workers (2010), an assemblage he labels 'market Islam' (2009a) or 'spiritual economies' (2009b). All these scholars stress the appropriation of religious values for economic ends in the contemporary Muslim world. As Osella and Osella write, the combination of 'material success with moral connectedness is coming to be seen as the exemplary contemporary way of being a modern, moral, Muslim' (2009, 204). Their emphasis on neoliberal forces in the shaping of contemporary Muslim life highlights a conception of worldly success which is, above all, defined in terms of market success.

While recognising the impact of transnational neoliberal forces upon Muslim life, this dissertation does not explore worldly success in its economic dimension only. Although Aïcha and Madou conceive of money as the portal to success, the unfolding of their lives shows that success in Mali is a complex social reality which is not defined only by neoliberal ends. In a study of economic change among the Giriama of Kenya (1972), the anthropologist David J. Parkin investigated the consequences of economic development for social relations, particularly people's ideas about them. Similarly, this dissertation contributes to understanding the importance of being both successful and Muslim in Mali as a subjective experience that is social in nature. It explores how the morality of success is simultaneously articulated with modern forms of globalisation, sub-Saharan regional and Malian contexts, and local social ethics, status and traditions. It also offers the first analysis of urban life in the administrative *Région* of Sikasso and contributes to an ethnographic understanding of southwest Mali in general.

After explaining my ethnographic approach, in this introduction I will position my research initially within the main debates which have shaped the anthropology of Islam in West Africa and outline the necessary analytical backdrop for understanding the coming chapters of this dissertation.

### ***The study of Bamanankan as ethnographic vector***

One of the main goals of my fieldwork was to study in depth the *lingua franca* of Mali, *Bamanankan* (literally, ‘the *Bamanan* language’). When I arrived in Mali in September 2008, I first lived two months in Bamako where I attended intensive *Bamanan* classes given by an excellent teacher, the linguist Mohamed Larabi Diallo of the University of Bamako. In the meantime I also prepared for my return to south Mali for my PhD fieldwork, an area with which I was already familiar and where I had developed a network of local contacts from my previous stay (see Chappatte 2005). Thanks to a local friend who had relatives living in Bougouni, I also opted for this urban locality as my main ethnographic site because the town was located in the *Bamanan* zone of the administrative *Région* of Sikasso.

My friend’s family welcomed me with open arms on my arrival in Bougouni on 12 December 2008; they housed me within the ‘familial compound’ (*carré*) in a room of a cement wing of the main building. Feeling at home in this family, I was able to focus all my energy and my time on the research project for the rest of my sojourn in Mali. Within days following my arrival I bought a Chinese-made bicycle on which I explored the town and its surrounding villages, and met their inhabitants throughout my stay.

It is, above all, my commitment to the study of *Bamanankan* that influenced the contacts I made in the field. This linguistic enthusiasm substantially determined the main actors of this PhD dissertation: the rural-urban migrants, labourers, craftsmen and small traders of Bougouni. Wishing to go beyond the limits of French language imposed by its elitist status in Mali, the former settlement of French Sudan, I did not focus especially on the lives of the members of the intellectual elite in this research. On the contrary, I privileged making contact with Malians who did not speak French. Always equipped with the *Bamanankan*-French dictionary written by Reverend Charles Bailleul (1996),<sup>6</sup> a diary and a pen, I consistently learnt *Bamanankan* in the field by taking linguistic as well as ethnographic notes while talking with *Bamanan* speakers. Month after month, this linguistic enthusiasm for the main local language shaped the social network through which this ethnography of everyday Islam is conceived. People like Salif the tailor, Fousseini the carter, and Boubacar the seller of *yuguyuguw*<sup>7</sup> (cheap clothes) became my closest friends and informants. Most ethnographic materials I present in this PhD dissertation are informal observations and conversations emerging in the course of the everyday life I shared with the inhabitants of Bougouni. However, this ethnography contains few gendered studies because, except for women of my host family, all friendships I developed beyond my housing situation were with men.

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<sup>6</sup> For an older edition, see Bailleul (1981).

<sup>7</sup> Literally, ‘*yuguyugu*’ is a *Bamanan* verb which means ‘to shake’. *Yuguyuguw* (Fr. *fripes*) are clothes of various Western origins (second-hand/unsold stock) or of Asian manufacturing sold at cheap prices in numerous West African markets. The seller commonly spreads *yuguyuguw* in piles; therefore clients had to rifle through them so as to find what they want.

Language is a privileged vehicle for local culture and historic imprint. In similar way to what Paul Riesman undertook in *Freedom in Fulani social life* (1977), my method consisted of apprehending a social life from words to values, and from these values to people's attitudes. The conversational materials I collected during the anthropology of street life I undertook by hanging around Bougouni, speak of a vibrant Mande legacy. The daily exploration of districts, public life and spaces of sociality on my bicycle connected me with social plots that did not originate from the wider world; they rather connoted the presence of expectations, social ethics, schemes and threats which are widely interpreted to be of Mande origin.

In parallel with recent liberal, economic and political changes brought by the coup d'état of the 26 March 1991, the meanings of Muslim life I explore in this dissertation result also from the resurgence and the reformulation of longstanding local processes of identification, belonging and sociality. I want to stress that contemporary religious phenomena are also produced by an older 'historical process that un-folds over the *longue durée*' (Marsden and Retsikas, forthcoming) represented by the triple Mande-Islamic-French legacy present in contemporary Mali. In order to balance the anthropological trend towards the study of 'modern forms of globalisation' (ibid.), Marsden and Retsikas invite the analyst to recognise what Guyer phrases as 'the long term sedimentation of experience' in contemporary forms of Islam and Muslim life (2004, 172).<sup>8</sup> Whereas the anthropologists Benjamin Soares (2005a) and Dorothea Schulz (2012) focus on the study of the impact of modern forms of globalisation such as neoliberalism and new media in Muslim life in Mali, I want to examine to what extent older processes of sedimentation are constitutive of local conceptions of Muslim life (and vice versa). I do so mostly by exploring the legacy of the Mande world found in contemporary forms of religious life in Bougouni.

### ***Positioning the PhD thesis within the anthropology of Islam in West Africa***

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<sup>8</sup> Such processes of sedimentation are well illustrated in two contemporary anthropological studies about Sierra Leone. In a book called *The Underneath of Things, violence, history and everyday in Sierra Leone* Mariane C. Ferme argues that 'the politics of ambiguity' and 'hermeneutic of suspicion' found in Mende daily life are partly the product of a violent history of warfare and slavery which has been sedimented and reappropriated in 'material objects, language, and social relations' (see 2001, introduction). In a similar vein, Rosalind Shaw explores how 'the predatory nature of modernity', such as lived through the violence of Sierra Leone's rebel war (1991-2001), has been associated with memories of the Atlantic slave trade among the Temne diviners (see 2002, introduction).

Most anthropological analyses of Islam in West Africa have focused on religious elites (Muslim scholars, *marabouts*, saints) as the main actors in the Islamic sphere (Cruise O'Brien 2003; Otayek 1993; Soares and Launay 1999). Their aim has been to study the relations of domination that have shaped Islamic orthodoxy, itself seen as plural, as represented by the classic dichotomy between 'traditional African Islam' or Sufi orders, on the one hand, and 'Reformists' or 'Islamists', on the other, through an historical approach. In this regard, the impact of the colonial period on the religious elite has encouraged a historical approach to the question of the Islamic orthodoxy in *Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) (Launay 1992; Mamdani 1996; Soares 2005a).

Consider, for instance, the French creation of *la politique musulmane* from the fear of pan-Islamism. The anthropologist Benjamin Soares stipulates that this latter policy was part of a broader *politique des races* mostly invented by the Governor-General of AOF William Ponty (1908-1915). This *politique des races* 'promulgated the idea that each "race", recognised as having its own "particular mentality", should be freed from "the religious and political influence of neighbouring groups"' (Soares 2005a, 53). This political approach of Islam emanating from a colonial imagination was turned into the notion of *Islam noire* (Black Islam) by French scholar-administrators such as Maurice Delafosse and Paul Marty. For them, West African Islam was different from Maghrebian and Middle-Eastern Islam, and had to be protected from their influences. In this way, the French intervention within the religious authorities was, in fact, an attempt to define what 'true' or legitimate Islam was. This is why, according to numerous scholars, it has been difficult to understand shifts of Islamic authority in AOF without relating those shifts to the actions of the French colonial authorities. Therefore, most anthropological analyses of Islam in West Africa have followed what I call a 'top-down' research perspective.

However, this historical focus on the elites and the state tended to sideline consideration of the most common contemporary forms of religious practice and belonging. Most Muslims in Africa are neither members of Sufi orders, nor reformists or Islamists (Otayek and Soares 2007).<sup>9</sup> Despite a notably increasing politicisation of Islam in West Africa and beyond, multiple forms of sociability, of thinking and living Islam, are present, and occur in differing socio-political contexts (see Gomez-Perez 2005).<sup>10</sup> Their main actors are the 'ordinary Muslims' (a category explored in detail in chapter 2) whom I emphasise in this PhD dissertation.

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<sup>9</sup> This observation was already made in the 1980s about the Muslims of Bamako (see Triaud 1988).

<sup>10</sup> On 'Political Islam' see Hirschkind (1997); on 'Islamic Revival' see Mahmood (2005).

The relevance of a focus on ordinary Muslims is that it allows me to position this research vis-à-vis current anthropological debates on Islam in which scholars are attempting to transcend the misleading dichotomy between 'traditional African Islam' and 'Reformists' (Osella and Osella 2008a; Otayek and Soares 2007). In similar vein, already in the early 1980s the anthropologist Michael Gilsenan critiqued the preoccupation of Western politics and media with the idea of 'Muslim mind' as the key to understanding the essence of the people of the Islamic world (1982). Following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, Western public discourses have tended to essentialise Islam as the sign of a dangerous 'other'. Translated into academic, political and journalistic discourses, this tendency often takes the form of an oversimplistic dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' Islam (Mamdani 2004) and of the fear of pan-Islamism (Miles 2004a; Miles 2004b).<sup>11</sup> My research on everyday Islam eschews the idea of a Muslim essence, as well as the traditional African Islam/Reformists and good/bad dichotomies, and the belief in the unity of the Islamic world, to show how such reductions impoverish our understanding of the multiplicity and complexity of Islamic discourses, identities, and religious experiences.

### ***Which anthropological approach to Islam?***

In the first chapter of his book *Muslim Society*, Ernest Gellner (1981) ambitiously attempts to build a macro model for understanding the working of Muslim society in the arid zone of the Maghreb and Middle-East. His approach to Islam as an institutionalized culture is very similar to Geertz when defining the scriptural style of Moroccan Islam and the illuminationist style of Indonesian Islam in *Islam Observed* (1968). These two scholars were mainly interested in how Islam shapes the contours of a society. Both scholars rightly focus on the fact that Islam - as a 'blueprint of social order'<sup>12</sup> - is imbricated within the structure of power of Muslim societies. Their macro-analysis, however, supports other scientific aims than those I wish to bring forward in this work. Their researches refer more to a sociology of Islamic institutions than to an anthropology of Muslim life. To do so, below I discuss the notion of piety and the realm of religious experiences in relation to a selection of some of the main works on Islam found in contemporary anthropology.

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<sup>11</sup> This tendency is sometimes strengthened by the power of *allodoxia*, which is the superimposition to the dominant discourse of the appearance of reason and the authority of science (Bourdieu 2004; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Gellner's expression (1981).

Talal Asad defined Islam as a discursive tradition (or an objectified form)<sup>13</sup> that includes the founding texts of the Qur'an and oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (Hadith) (1986). What does the concept of discursive tradition mean in terms of an anthropological approach? Firstly, the Islamic tradition refers to all institutionalized conceptions of the past (Qur'an and Hadith) related to present practices (Ibid, 15). Secondly, the tradition as a discursive phenomenon is linked to power. Therefore, Islam is primarily defined as an orthodoxy, itself stemming from relationships of power. In this regard, Asad argues that the anthropologist must study the social and historical modalities of the relationships of power which frame the enactment of traditions and the resistances they encounter (Ibid, 16). In this way, the realm of religious experience is foremost theorised as the practice of Islamic precepts based on the interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith.

This approach is well illustrated by the feminist Saba Mahmood (2005) in her book *Politics of Piety, the Islamic revival and the feminist subject* in which she explores the grassroots women's piety movement in the mosques of Cairo. Based on Foucault's notions of power and subject, her analysis is seductive because it explains the subordination of women to Muslim norms of piety of reformist character. For Mahmood, the practice of the veil is neither the outcome of women's oppression, nor the outcome of women's free choice, but 'a disciplinary practice that constitutes pious subjectivities' (Ibid, 195).

However, her account of Muslim practice is limited because of the Asadian scope she takes that reduces Islam to a 'Religion of the Book', and hence piety to the practice of Islamic precepts. As Schielke noted, by stressing the concept of discursive tradition, the analyst can only study the continuity of Islamic traditions (2006), and this mostly through its intellectual debates. In this way of thinking, piety can be easily and wrongly generalised. According to Osella and Osella (2008a), by stressing the uniqueness of Muslim experience, the anthropologist over-privileges the coherence and disciplinary power of contemporary piety movements. Focusing on the personal as well as the social nature of pious practice, Haniffa rightly argues that Mahmood forgets simply to analyse 'the larger context in which such a self is desired or the social consequences of choosing such a self' (2008, 11). If the anthropologist would like to grasp how a Muslim life is shaped by worldly matters, another approach is needed.

Furthermore, theorising Islam exclusively as a 'Religion of the Book' may lead to overlaps between anthropology and theology. Robert Launay shows how the problem of interpretation of the Qur'an is primarily a theological one linked to discussion of the purity of Islam and not

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<sup>13</sup> On the process of objectification of religion, see Eickelmann and Piscatorri (1996).



an anthropological one (1992). For a Muslim scholar, all the Islamic sacred texts contain perfectly straightforward rules. The problem is not to know which interpretation is the best, but to know who knows most when there is disagreement over a given rule. For a Muslim scholar, there is no alternative to *the* interpretation but only ignorance. The same logic applies to Islamic rituals.

Islam as an anthropological subject should not be reduced to what Durkheim calls its *prénotions* (allegedly self-evident representations) which tend to enclose the nature of the study of Islam within its orthodoxy and its purity.<sup>14</sup> The strength of anthropology is to open new ways of investigating Muslim life (see Alles 2008); recent anthropological studies have rightly demonstrated the multiplicity of ways of being Muslim, and the contested area of norms of piety (Marsden 2005; Masquelier 2007; Philippon 2006; Soares 2005a). Starting from their findings, I can assert only that piety, as lived experience, is heterogeneous. It covers different religious orientations implemented in different cultural contexts and shaped by different living conditions.

When the analyst goes beyond the concept of discursive tradition the very field of the anthropology of Islam is questioned.<sup>15</sup> There is no such thing as an anthropological essence of Islam that deserves a separate field of study. On the contrary, as Triaud argues, 'Muslims live in concrete societies and in concrete situations' which need to be investigated (2009, 23); the ethnographic study of Muslim life refers foremost to an anthropology of religion in which piety is primarily defined and assessed in term of religious experience.

Framing the argument in a more provocative manner, I agree that 'there is too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam in the sense of a lack of balance between the emphasis on religious commitment and a not always sufficient account of the lives of which it is a part' (Schielke 2010, 2). However, Schielke, like Asad (1993), does not consider the study of Muslim life as part of an anthropology of religion due to the fact that the Muslim notion of religion (*dîn*) includes only Islam, Christianity and Judaism as genuine religions. But what makes the three 'Religions of the Book' so special that, as lived experience, they fundamentally differ from other religious phenomena?

In this work, the term religion refers rather to its Latin etymology '*religare*' which signifies to link, to connect or to join (to the divine, the religious). Arguing for a shared 'space of discussion' instead of a separate 'disciplinary subfield' (Lambek 2000, 310), I hence conceive the anthropology of religion as the study of the relationship between the human being, his/her

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<sup>14</sup> On *prénotions*, see Durkheim (1894, chapter 2).

<sup>15</sup> In a recent article about the encounter between lay Jains and environmental activists in the Animal Liberations Movements, the anthropologist James Laidlaw questions the idea of ethical traditions as immutable by showing how ethical choices are embedded in 'the contingency of the situation' (2010).

living conditions and the religious phenomena, which, as illustrated below, can be articulated in people's worlds in many different ways.

### ***Walking an earthly path***

In the introduction to a recent edited book, *Islam and Muslim politics in Africa*, Otayek and Soares express the current reformulations of Islam in Africa as the emergence of an *islam mondain* or 'Islam in the present world' (2007). The notion of *islam mondain* opens the possibility of exploration of Muslim life *in relation to* contemporary worldly matters (such as modernity, social success and globalization) instead of *in confrontation with* them. The religious phenomena of *islam mondain* become not alternatives to the mundane world but inserted into it. Put differently, the study of '*islam mondain* does not privilege Islam over anything else, emphasizing instead the actual world in which Muslims find themselves' (Osella and Soares 2009, 12). Going one step further in the unpacking of the 'religious' dimension of the religious phenomenon as an anthropological category, in the introduction to a forthcoming book called *Articulating Islam*, Marsden and Retsikas, through the concept of 'articulation', invite the analyst to study how the religious phenomenon is constantly 'produced, reproduced and transformed in particular social and historical contexts' and this happens in mutually constitutive dynamics and unpredictable ways (forthcoming).<sup>16</sup>

In line with the concepts of '*islam mondain*' and 'articulation', the way I explore everyday Islam among ordinary Muslims living in Bougouni and southwest Mali is inspired by the local saying: 'Tomorrow is in God's hands' (*Sini be Ala bolo*). Analytically I presuppose that ordinary Muslims I met strive to live a proper Muslim life for two fundamental religious rewards; they do it motivated by the classic 'access to Heaven' betterment of doctrinal orthodoxy; but they also do it so as to achieve worldly ambitions which make a successful life on earth. Referring to the proverb above, my Muslim friend stated God rewards and punishes Muslims on earth already. In this way - moving forward in life - (the earthly path) is as important as - the gates of Paradise - (the afterlife) for ordinary Muslims I met in Bougouni and beyond.

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<sup>16</sup> Schielke invites analysts to study religion as 'a grand scheme' that is 'external and superior to everyday experience, a higher and reliable measure and guideline of life' (2010, 14). However, by postulating the existence of "grand" schemes by contrast to "small" schemes the analyst risks essentialising human activities through a rigid hierarchy. I instead wonder under what specific circumstances the human being can turn a grand scheme into a small scheme (and vice-versa).

However, one can argue that concerns about the earthly path and the afterlife are interconnected in Muslim life; therefore, they cannot be apprehended separately. For instance, once during a bus journey I overheard a conversation between two young adult Muslims concerning the recent death of an elder and reflecting upon his funeral by making links with people's earthly achievements and Muslim identity. For them, the fact that his funeral was attended by an immense crowd signified two linked things: the local community, by paying tribute en masse to their elder, acknowledged his successful life on earth; therefore, he surely went to Paradise. By contrast, locals say a poorly attended funeral might be a harbinger that Hell was the fate of the deceased. The earthly path and the afterlife are so closely related because people think the judgement of God does not diverge far from communal appraisal. Although the earthly path and the afterlife cannot be dissociated, I analytically emphasise the former because it is ethnographically richer and more concrete than the belief in the afterlife and the consequences of God's judgement.

### ***The events of 1991***

The historical conjuncture framing the religious momentum explored in this ethnography stems mostly from changes brought about by the events of 1991 in Mali. Following successive droughts, economic difficulties and austerity measures imposed by IMF injunctions in the 1980s (among other factors), the military dictatorship of Moussa Traoré, who had ruled the country since the overthrow of the socialist regime of Modiba Keita in 1968, faced growing popular dissatisfaction. The population demonstrated several times on the streets of Bamako between January and March 1991; they demanded the end of the single party regime and the setting up of multiparty elections;<sup>17</sup> state repression led to 200 deaths between 22 and 25 March. However, on 26 March 1991, a group of officers led by Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré arrested Moussa Traoré and the principle leaders of his regime and suspended the constitution. Within days following the coup d'état the new elites (officers and civilians) created the CTSP (*Comité de Transition pour le Salut du Peuple*) which appointed a civilian-led government. A transitional period of 14 months paved the road to multi-partyism and democracy through the organisation of a national conference, a gathering of several weeks including representatives from the transitional government, all opposition and political groups,

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<sup>17</sup> Anti-governments demonstrations and riots occurred in most regional towns of Mali as well. The administration of Bougouni hosted an important set of colonial archives which were burnt during the uprising of March 1991.

and the major trade unions as well as some members of the leading international aid and finance agencies. Its outcome was embedded in the voting for a new constitution and a series of elections (for municipalities, national assembly, and presidency). On 27 April 1992, Alpha Oumar Konaré became the first elected President of the Third Republic of Mali.<sup>18</sup> The post-Cold War era in Africa opened up to the decade of 'second independence'<sup>19</sup> in many West African countries (see Clark 2000). This new democratic era brought changes that still shape the broader contexts in which this ethnography is situated.

### ***The French legacy of laïcité***

Similarly to most former French settlements of West Africa, the *laïcité* of the Malian state was inscribed in its constitution at independence in 1960.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, its enforcement has differed depending on the successive regimes of the postcolonial period. Inspired by both, the French colonial legacy of *laïcité* and a socialist ideology, the socialist regime of Modiba Keita (1960-1968) 'rhetorically integrated Islam' in its discourses while prohibiting any religious associations (such as the UCM<sup>21</sup> of reformist allegiance) in order to avoid the influence of religious actors on political affairs (Leiniger 2009). The military dictatorship of Moussa Traoré (1968-1991) softened its religious policy, but still acted in an ambiguous manner. The government launched the country's sole officially authorised Islamic association called AMUPI (*Association Malienne pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam*) in 1981. This latter organization was, above all, used as an instance of regulation of conflicts between reformist Muslims and Sufi orders and as an instrument of coordination of the 'petrodollars' coming from Arabic countries in the 1980s (Brenner 1993b; Soares 2005b, 82).<sup>22</sup> By creating the AMUPI, the state set a closer control on Muslim actors in the country. At the same time, however, by banning the opening of bars and night-clubs during the holy month of Ramadan, the state showed its sympathy for Islam.

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<sup>18</sup> Alpha Oumar Konaré won the second presidential election of the Third Republic of Mali in 1997. In 2002, he became the first President of Mali who had not ended his term of office in prison. The second elected President of Mali, Amadou Toumani Touré (nicknamed ATT), the hero of 26 March 1991, was overthrown after my departure by a coup d'état on 22 March 2012. Further links with the 2012 Malian crisis will be developed in the conclusion of my PhD dissertation.

<sup>19</sup> Other political shifts happened in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Togo.

<sup>20</sup> The French colonial state enacted the law about *laïcité* (the separation between religion and state) in 1905 (Soares 2005a).

<sup>21</sup> *L'Union Culturelle Musulmane* (UCM) was founded in 1953. It united all reformist movements. The regime of Moussa Traoré authorised the reconstitution of the UCM in 1970. One year later, the UCM was accused of public disorder and was abolished for good (see Amselle 1985, 346; 352).

<sup>22</sup> After the Second World War, Mali saw the emergence of reformist influences brought by pilgrims and Islamic students who returned from the Middle East. The early postcolonial period was characterised by tensions between traditional African Islam and new reformist movements in urban Mali (see Amselle 1985).

The Third Republic of Mali reinforced the French legacy of *laïcité*. 'After the 1991 coup, the new Malian constitution reaffirmed the principle of secularism and religiously based political parties were not permitted' (Soares 2005b, 85). The Malian state did not endorse the Traoré regime's sympathy for Islam; it permitted the opening of bars and night-clubs during Ramadan out of respect for its secular principle. Being an overwhelmingly majority-Muslim country (90%+) with a commitment to *laïcité*, Mali has been praised on the international stage as a model of religious toleration.<sup>23</sup> For instance, in the course of my investigation of the variety of religious programmes broadcast on the four local radios of Bougouni, each radio director explained to me the diversity of Islamic as well as non-Islamic programmes their radio broadcasted by asserting that 'Mali is a secular country' (*Le Mali est un pays laïc*). One added: 'As long as they pay the requested fees for broadcasting, I cannot forbid these religious programmes.' More importantly, the presence of three private radios in Bougouni highlighted that, besides the reinforcement of its French legacy of *laïcité*, the Third Republic of Mali also brought new civil liberties which have had a considerable impact on religious expression in public life.

### ***Islam through the new civil liberties***

During the period of single-party rule (1960-1991), only state medias, such as *Radio Nationale* (the state radio of ORTM (*Office de Radiodiffusion et Télévision du Mali*) and *L'Essor* (the official state newspaper), officially existed; these state medias strictly represented what Sangaré called '*la voix de son maître*' (2001).<sup>24</sup> However, since 1991, the democratic shifts in Mali have been characterised by an increasingly lively public sphere, abetted by the new freedom of the press and association; both civil liberties have allowed Malians to develop and espouse a great variety of opinions, identities and claims in public through social events, associations and private media (see Perret 2005). With regard to religious expression, these civil liberties, helped by the multiplication of innovative media of religious communication (TV and radio, recorded sermons, pamphlets...),<sup>25</sup> have further disjointed the Malian 'Islamic

<sup>23</sup> 'Mali received praise on the international stage as a model of toleration and for its commitment to *laïcité* or secularism and after 11 September 2001 was held up as "the sole exemplar of freedom in a majority-Muslim" in the world' (Soares 2005b, 78).

<sup>24</sup> The voice of his master (e.g. the Malian state).

<sup>25</sup> On the impact of 'small media' in the Muslim world, see Eickelmann and Anderson (2003).

sphere',<sup>26</sup> and opened new ways of being Muslim. These civil liberties have also increased the visibility of Islam in public in Mali.

In her book *Muslims and new media in West Africa: pathways to God* (2012), Schulz focuses on the female face of this religious renewal in the urban localities of San and Bamako; through the decision of 'taking the veil' as an act of 'public self-expression', she illustrates how the public practice of piety has become an important element of religious identity among female participants in the Islamic renewal movements (Ibid, 9-10). Ordinary Muslims of Bougouni have also commonly adopted outward signs of piety (such as the Islamic dress code and the communal prayer), however, they not only appreciate them as pious expressions, but also assess them as shaping the broader politics of mundane success. Tensions arise from the fact that markers of Muslim identity simultaneously convey pious expression and mundane status in Mali.

### ***Institutional and liberal reforms in Mali: the case of Bougouni***

The most ambitious institutional reform of the Third Republic of Mali has been the Malian decentralisation. From the Jacobin<sup>27</sup> and paternalistic Malian states of Modibo Keita and Moussa Traoré, the current Malian state triggered in 1993 a complex bottom-up process called *la Décentralisation*. It attempted to involve, through the GREM/GLEM (*Groupes Régionaux/Locaux d'Etudes et de Mobilisation*), the participation of each level of the society in the constitution and goals of new territorial collectivities which would receive delegated powers (see Kassibo et al. 1997). The outcome of this reform has been the creation of three new levels of territorial collectivities I mention here in ascending order: 701 *Communes*, 46 *Cercles*, and 8 *Régions*. As of 2012, Malian decentralisation is being achieved through the third mandate of locally elected representatives (communal councillors, mayors, representatives of *Cercle* and *Région*, the *Haut Conseil des Collectivités Territoriales*). With this reform the town of Bougouni, already a *Commune Urbaine* since 1982,<sup>28</sup> was elevated to the administrative centre (*chef-lieux*) of *Le Cercle de Bougouni*, a vast area of 20,082 km<sup>2</sup> which is composed of 26

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<sup>26</sup> According to Soares and Launay (1999, 504–506), the Islamic sphere in West Africa emerged during the colonial period. They argued, with the 'the free circulation of persons and commodities throughout the colony', the political economy of French West Africa accelerated the 'Islamisation' of large parts of the colony and led to the formation of an 'Islamic sphere' separated from the state and from the traditional social structures (ethnicity, kinship and castes).

<sup>27</sup> Highly centralised state (French style).

<sup>28</sup> Before the Malian decentralisation, only 19 localities were recognised as having the status of *Commune Urbaine*, among them, 13 became *Commune Urbaine* during the colonial period (in 1955) (see Kassibo et al. 1997); the *Commune Urbaine de Bougouni* is composed of 7 districts and 21 villages.

*Communes* spread over 482 localities (see USAID-Mali and CSA-PROMISAM 2007); roughly 450,000 people live in this populous *Cercle* of Mali. Regional Malian towns, such as Bougouni, by becoming administrative centres of one of the 46 *Cercles* of Mali, have benefited from the implementation of numerous state services which have boosted their growth. With the arrival of new civil servants (such as teachers, doctors, nurses, and various white-collar workers and administrators), Malian decentralisation has supported the development of the local intellectual elite of Bougouni.

Officially cutting the link with a socialist conception of the state and its control of economic institutions, the 1991 Malian constitution also sanctions the right to property and freedom of enterprise (see Rawson 2000). Besides its liberal reforms, the Malian state 'has tended to meet International Monetary Fund and World Bank targets and timetables for structural adjustment programmes, privatization schemes and reductions in state budgets deficit' (Soares 2005b, 77). The implementation of a new liberal economy, intertwined with current political stability, has facilitated the flow of aid and loans, foreign investments and foreigners in Mali as well as the reinforcement of a spirit of entrepreneurship among Malians through the development of local trade.<sup>29</sup> With a 6-percent GDP growth rate during the late 1990s and early 2000s, Mali was regarded as an 'economic example' in the West African sub-region (see Laloupo 2004, 252). In parallel, previously rare goods, such as TV sets, mobile phones and DVD players (among other electrical items), internet access, motorbikes and cars, have become more common in urban Mali.<sup>30</sup> Before 1991, the economy of Bougouni rested mainly on the two ageing factories of the CMDT (*Compagnie Malienne de Développement du textile*) and farming (cereals, cotton, and cattle). After 1991, even though most of the families of Bougouni remain involved in farming, the secondary and tertiary domains have increased in the town with the development of local trade, the arrival of foreign investors, and various NGOs and bilateral governmental projects (13 in total).<sup>31</sup>

The post-Cold War era in Mali has been characterised not only by North-South aid, but also by the increasing business between Africa and the East. New opportunities for consumption in Bougouni have been enlarged by the rise of new Asian producers and especially by China. Rapid urbanization in Mali during the 1990s coincided with an influx of cheap and mostly Asian-made items termed '*produits chinois*' (Chinese product) by Malians

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<sup>29</sup> Since the new democratic and liberal era initiated by the 1991 coup d'état, the 'United States, European donor countries and multilateral lending agencies have all regularly praised Mali as a model for the transition to democracy, the implementation of economic reforms and liberalization' (Soares 2005a, 77).

<sup>30</sup> With regard to material conditions, *the Future of Mud* documentary (Vogel, Marchand, and Musée National du Mali 2007) illustrates how the town of Djenné has changed since 1996 in ways similar to those I observed in Bougouni.

<sup>31</sup> On NGOs and bilateral government projects in Bougouni, see *Plan quinquennal de développement économique, social et culturel (2006-2010) de la Commune Urbaine de Bougouni* (PAAD/Helvetas and Ministère de l'administration territoriale et des collectivités locales (DNCT) 2005).

themselves. Sale of these goods boosted the uptake of small trade as a complement or alternative to farming for many Malians moving to urban areas. Thanks to their being both affordable and available, cheap goods have become ubiquitous in urban households. Although not long-lasting, they have made what were formerly prestige goods available for purposes of self-fashioning by ordinary Malians.

Another aspect in the recent urbanisation of Bougouni has been the Ivorian crisis which began in late 1990s. The plantation economy (mostly cocoa) supporting the postcolonial 'Ivorian Miracle'<sup>32</sup> had attracted cheap labourers predominantly from northern Ivory Coast, Mali and Burkina Faso since the late colonial period. Most elders of Bougouni worked seasonally in these plantations during their youth; others settled there. However, when this 'mining'<sup>33</sup> economy entered into crisis in the 1990s, ethnic tensions between indigenous people of the forest zone and northerners (labelled 'Duyla') arose. The stigmatisation of northerners in south Ivory Coast caused a partial return of migrants to their home region. This civil war particularly hit southern Mali where all families had at least one of their members working in the former Ivorian El-Dorado (see Gary-Toukara 2008). Many migrants from southwest Mali settled back in their localities of origin and invested in neighbouring towns such as Bougouni.<sup>34</sup> An important minority among them managed to build cement houses and to be involved in local trade with what they earned over the years in Côte d'Ivoire. The flux of migrants returning from Ivory Coast, coupled with their remittances, supported the recent urbanisation of Bougouni.

Boosted by these dynamics, Bougouni has tripled its population since the events of 1991. The formerly large village has been transformed in two decades into an important regional town of more than 60,000 inhabitants, the third biggest town of the *Région of Sikasso*. As a growing crossroad of the West African savannah, Bougouni has become an important centre of migration to which foreigners and adventurers come in order to build a better life.

### ***The legacy of the Mande world***

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<sup>32</sup> Numerous experts and scholars attributed the *Ivorian Miracle* to its plantation economy. In 1990, Côte d'Ivoire accounted for 40 percent of French West African regional income, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/dossiers/cotedivoire/> (retrieved 10.02.2012).

<sup>33</sup> The Ivorian Miracle ran out of steam due to the inherent 'cycle of cocoa'. Indeed, histories of cocoa in Brazil, Ecuador, Ghana... and Côte d'Ivoire have all followed the same 'Boom – Crisis' cycle. Basically, the economy of plantation is a 'mining' economy in which the principal resource is the forest zone (Ruf 1995a; Ruf 1995b). This economy is based on a system of a 'pioneer front' (the sporadic development of unexploited tropical forest lands to plant cocoa trees) and the conquest of the forest zone by migration (see Woods 2003, 643). As soon as the forest zone disappears, the cocoa boom ends and an economic recession begins.

<sup>34</sup> After my departure, the presidential election of 2010 in Côte d'Ivoire ended up in a political crisis between the southerner Laurent Gbagbo and the northerner Alassane Ouattara. After months of conflict, the pro-Ouattara forces, helped by UN and French forces, captured and arrested Laurent Gbagbo. The investiture of Alassane Ouattara as President of Côte d'Ivoire happened on 21 May 2011. Since then, the situation has defused in Côte d'Ivoire, but tensions remain.



Nowadays the cultural influence of the Mande world crosses several West African countries, but its heartland was southwest Mali and eastern Guinea, the birthplace of the great Mali Empire established by Sundiata Keita in the thirteenth century.<sup>35</sup> The Mandinka, the people of the Mande world, were classified in the colonial period into numerous ethnic groups.<sup>36</sup> I am particularly interested in the relation between Islam and one of the founding and largest ethnic groups of the Mande people, the *Bamanan* (or *Bamana*, Bambara), because the town of Bougouni is located in their historic zone.

The presence of Islam was accepted in the Mande world for centuries. The first contacts between Mande people and Muslims happened in the seventh and eight centuries with Arab travellers who explored the Sahara desert from southern Morocco. Then, Muslim traders and Islamic scholars, known under the name of marabouts, gradually and progressively spread southward down to the hearth of the Mande world, the forest zones and, to a lesser extent, the coastal countries of West Africa. The *kafo* of Bougouni was a vassal of the powerful *Bamanan* kingdom of Ségou (from the seventeenth century to 1861). At that time, the tiny minority of Muslim traders and marabouts coexisted peacefully with the overwhelming majority of the population (farmers and craftsmen), notables, and the royal family who practised what anthropologists now call 'the *bamanaya* religion' (see Bravmann 2001, 35–43).<sup>37</sup> These cohabitations illustrated the centuries-old processes of accommodation between Islam and local religious practices which preceded the mass-Islamisation of the entire Mande world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

However, the *Bamanan* have been known to remain attached to their traditional religion. Historically, Islam achieved relatively slow progress among them compared to other Mandinka people (see Conrad 2001, 27). As a consequence, *Bamanan* has covered somewhat heterogeneous signifiers, but one of them has been 'pagans of the south' (see Bazin 1985, 101; 113). *Bamanan* as a populous ethnic group lately Islamised tended to stand for what was not Muslim in the past. Nowadays the wording '*bamanaya*' is still associated with un-Islamic religious practices of Mande origin whether *Bamanan* or not. Therefore, in an introductory chapter of an edited book called *Bamana: the art of existence in Mali*, the anthropologist Jean-Paul Colleyn wrote: 'According to all the sources, the people who were (and still are) eventually claiming to be Bamana refer to the fact that they don't perform prayers to Allah, the Muslim God, but remain faithful to the religion of their ancestors' (Colleyn 2001a, 20). Furthermore, unlike north Mali, north Ivory Coast and eastern Guinea, south Mali underwent a

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<sup>35</sup> On the epic of Sundiata Keita, see Niane (1960), Jonhson (1986) and Sisoko and Johnson (1992); on the Mande creation myth, see Dieterlen (1957); on the problem of the Mande creation myth, see Austen (2008).

<sup>36</sup> On an illustration of such colonial classification, see Delafosse (1912); on the inventive and coercive nature of such colonial process, see Dozon (1985).

<sup>37</sup> On the notion of *Bamanaya* religion, see Dieterlen (1951).

late Islamisation (1900 – currently). Many of my Muslim friends from central and northern Mali did not understand why I wanted to study Muslim life in Bougouni (rather than in Djenné, Timbuktu or other historic towns); one of them significantly told me ‘the *Cercle* of Bougouni is a land of fragile faith’. As a newly Islamic land, southwest Mali has been stigmatised as backward by northern Muslims in general. Indeed, numerous are the Malians who suspect the autochthons of Bougouni of being uncivilised, bad Muslims and expert in occult manipulations. However, by 2008-2010, the overwhelming majority of inhabitants of southwest Mali I met considered themselves as ‘*Bamanan*-Muslim’, a linguistic juxtaposition which would have seemed contradictory 40 years earlier according to Colleyn.

Today, *Bamanan* as a way of life is mostly perceived by scholars as a past reality preserved in museum collections. Changes brought by ‘colonialism, Islam, capitalism, and the establishment of Western educational system’ (Frank 2001, 51) accelerated the collapse of the traditional *Bamanan* culture. But Frank concludes by writing that ‘the resurgence of *bogolan* and the continued vitality of such institutions as *Ci-wara* and *Sogow* attest the resilience and dynamism of Bamana social and aesthetic traditions’ (2001, 51). In line with Frank’s concluding remark, I do not mean to enclose the *Bamanan* way of life in museum. Arguing against the predominance of the new neoliberal order as analytical framework (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2000) and the sharp historical line implied in ‘post-theories’ (see Kipnis 2008 preface) I explore how local conceptions of Muslim life in postcolonial Mali are also shaped by processes of recurrence and reproduction of *Bamanan* identity in different domains of local social life.

### ***The Chapters***

Chapter 1 first provides a portrait of the town of Bougouni with a focus on religious changes; it shows how the town of Bougouni has been shaped by wider transformations, although it continues to suffer from a bad reputation in Mali. The conclusion to this chapter, explains the centrality of street life to people’s lives in urban Mali. Chapter 2 argues that the increasingly public expressions of piety observed in post-1991 Mali, in addition to being supported by the new civic liberties, result from a longstanding cultivation of ostentatious identities promoted by the visual dimension of street life in Mali. Chapter 3 examines how complex interactions between local understandings of Islam and being Muslim are informed by the reformulations of a set of sacred and ordinary virtues and local norms and practices of ‘social ethics’

(*hadamadenya*), which are widely interpreted to be of Mande origin. Chapter 4 focuses on a peculiar field of migratory experiences: rural Malians who respond to the challenge of earthly ambitions through undertaking 'adventures' (*tunga*) to urban area. However consumerism in town has increased and made more visible the material distinctions in wealth between Malians which, in turn, has fostered 'jealousy' (*keleya*) and made 'egoism' (*negoya*) a source of public concern to the inhabitants of Bougouni. When moral evaluation of someone's success or failure in life brings forth divisive sentiments, the bad reputation of Bougouni resurfaces in the shape of accusations of witchcraft and sorcery that I examine in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 explores generational issues over Islam in contemporary Mali through the resurgence of a local tradition of music (guitars and local drums) in the so called '*zikiriw*' promoted by the powerful *Ansar Dine* Muslim association. Chapter 7 completes the exploration of urban street life and its metaphor of sight through an anthropology of the night in Bougouni. It demonstrates how the interplay between day life and night life is an important component of morality in Mali.

## **1. Bougouni, a crossroads in southwest Mali**

Bougouni is located in the savannah of southwest Mali; a peripheral zone that never played a prominent role in West African history. According to the historian Brian Peterson this region 'was something of a zone of refuge that had absorbed waves of population over the centuries' who fled 'state control and enslavement' during the pre-colonial period (2011, 37–38). At that time the region, relatively low in population density, was divided into multiple chiefdoms called *kafo* each composed of grouping of villages dominated by powerful lineage. Villager livelihoods depended on an extensive mode of agricultural production (hoe farming) practised in abundant but relatively poor soils. Such small kin-based organisations did not control long-trade exchange (which was in the hands of Muslim traders), and would probably be termed 'acephalous' or 'chiefless societies' by Jack Goody (1971). As a 'buffer zone'<sup>38</sup> or borderland between the pre-colonial Empire of Wassoulou and the Kingdom of Kenedougou, southwest Mali suffered unevenly from the widespread predations that occurred during the wars of Samory in the late nineteenth century. Samory Touré, the founder of the Empire of Wassoulou, enslaved numerous inhabitants there so as to finance his fierce resistance to the colonisation.<sup>39</sup> The French conquest stabilised the region in the 1880s, but it continued to be a marginal zone. Southwest Mali was on the fringe of colonial policy in terms of investments compared to forest and coastal West Africa. It remained an area characterised by remoteness, poverty and lack of economic opportunities (see Meker 1980) in which labour migration to coastal countries became an important economic strategy. Ever since the implementation of a colonial 'head tax' (*nisɔngo*)<sup>40</sup> in 1895, southwest Mali has further been marked by migratory processes of an economic nature. Many of its inhabitants moved to coastal countries as seasonal workers in the cash crop economy; a minority among them permanently settled in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire (mostly). As one of the last zones of *Bamanan* country to become predominantly Muslim (see introduction), southwest Mali has also been specifically stigmatised as backward by Northern Muslims in general. This marginal past still casts its shadow over Bougouni which does not enjoy a good reputation among Malians who suspect its autochthons of being uncivilised, bad Muslims and expert in occult manipulations.

Bougouni's bad reputation endured because of its relative underdevelopment in the early postcolonial period compared to other Malian towns with similar colonial pasts. In the 1980s, 'when we told a civil servant that he was posted to Bougouni this latter became very scared'.<sup>41</sup> When a transfer to Kidal (extreme Northeast of Mali) was interpreted as sort of punishment due to its extreme geographical remoteness, a transfer to Bougouni was also

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<sup>38</sup> Peterson's expression (2008, 263).

<sup>39</sup> On the wars of Samory in south Mali, see Peterson (2011, 24–57).

<sup>40</sup> On colonial head tax (*nisɔngo*) see Peterson (2011, 66–67).

<sup>41</sup> Nouhoum Doumbia, Bougouni, 17 Nov. 2009.

understood as kind of career regression because of its backwardness and the occult threat of its inhabitants. Although electricity arrived in town during Second World War and a tarred road in 1962, Bougouni remained a big village until recently. The town started its growth in the 1970s with the construction of one cotton factory that developed the cash crop economy in its hinterland and employed hundreds of locals.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, during the 1980s, cement houses and motor vehicles were rare and streets all unsurfaced. At that time not a single house had more than one floor. Hearsay was that better-off families did not dare to build houses with multiple storeys because they feared falling victim to '*mauvaises personnes*' (bad persons).<sup>43</sup> Although elevated to the status of 18<sup>th</sup> *Commune Urbaine* of Mali in 1982, Bougouni had fewer than 20,000 inhabitants in 1991.

In the last two decades, however, Bougouni expanded considerably and became an important regional town. Its growth has followed general tendencies shaping urbanisation within Africa, such as the increasing phenomena of migration and mobility enabled by the development of modern transport and road networks in much of the continent (De Bruijn, Van Dijk, and Foeken 2001; Hanna and Hanna 2009; Gugler 2002). In addition, smaller and medium-sized administrative towns have since the 1980s grown more quickly than the largest cities due to a combination of factors such as 'the generally more difficult economic conditions facing urban dwellers in the last two decades, the on-going deterioration<sup>44</sup> of infrastructure and public services, and since the 1990s, the spatial decentralisation of investment and planning decision' (Tacoli 2001: 143).<sup>45</sup> Regional factors also explain the growth of Bougouni.

The vast savannah of southwest Mali, a transition zone between the Sahelian zone of northern Mali and the coastal forests of Côte d'Ivoire, became an important zone of migration within Mali due to the increasing demographic pressure affecting northern Mali, by contrast, with the availability of land resources in southern Mali, considered as '*le grenier du Mali*' (the granary of Mali). In parallel, the wild oscillation in food production caused by the desiccation of the Sahel has increased a general 'southbound migration' within Mali (see De Bruijn and Van Dijk 2003). In this regard, southwest Mali has witnessed significant rural-rural migration since the late 1980s as illustrated by the arrival of Dogon farmers (see Konaté 2003). Although low in fertility and sensitive to erosion compared to the coastal forests of Côte d'Ivoire, southern Mali benefits from a longer and heavier rainy season than northern Mali. Migrants from northern Mali stressed that 'the issue of water' (*ji.ko*) is much less pressing than in their native Sahel. As a relatively small town, Bougouni still offers complementary farming opportunities; 'In these

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<sup>42</sup> A second cotton factory was built in the 1980s.

<sup>43</sup> On the occult, see chapter 5.

<sup>44</sup> The development of modern transport has been undermined by a lack of maintenance of road networks.

<sup>45</sup> On similar analysis, see Bertrand and Dubresson (1997).

less densely populated centres, urban and peri-urban agriculture could more easily be combined with other urban occupations as a livelihood strategy' (Tacoli 2001, 145).<sup>46</sup> Indeed, most families in Bougouni complement their urban activities with small breeding and a garden<sup>47</sup> within their courtyard, and the cultivation of a plot of land in the vicinity of the town. Bougouni has also attracted an important rural-urban migration of people from the surrounding rural hinterland and beyond who go on an adventure to the town (see chapter 5). Other countryside men hide in town in order to avoid taxes back in their villages. They become what Malians name '*populations flottantes*' (fleeting population).<sup>48</sup> Strategically located next to Ivorian and Guinean boundaries and along the international tarred road Bamako – Abidjan (the only tarred road crossing the boundary between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire), Bougouni has also drew international traders and smugglers as well. Due to the weakness of the Guinean franc compared to the CFA franc, smuggled cigarettes, motorbikes and weapons (among other products) from Guinea arrive and pass through the town. The town witnesses also an important 'gradual migration' (see Van Dijk, Foeken, and Van Til, Kiky 2001); migrants who temporarily settle in small towns first, before continuing to larger towns such as Bamako where opportunities are supposed to be more profitable but risks bigger.<sup>49</sup> Finally, the emergence of the Ivorian crisis in late 1990s with its ethnic tension caused a partial return of migrants to their home region. This civil war has particularly hit southern Mali where all families had one and more of their members working in the former Ivorian El-Dorado (see Gary-Toukara 2008).

This rapid growth of Bougouni has nurtured alternative views which nuance its bad reputation. Boosted by these dynamics, Bougouni has tripled its population since the events of 1991. It has become by far the biggest locality within a savannah of roughly 40,000 km<sup>2</sup> (composed of the administrative *Cercles* of Kolondiéba, Yanfolila and Bougouni). Its weekly market on Thursday attracts merchants from as far as Bamako, Sikasso and Guinea. Its '*forains*' (stallholders) supply a network of weekly rural markets within southwest Mali down to Manankoro. What was formerly a large village has been transformed in two decades into an important regional town of more than 60,000 inhabitants, the third biggest town of the *Région de Sikasso*.

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<sup>46</sup> On similar analysis, see Girault (1997).

<sup>47</sup> Families in Bougouni are known to cultivate lady's fingers (*dagan*) for the market of Bamako.

<sup>48</sup> Nouhoum Doumbia, Bougouni, 17 Nov. 2009.

<sup>49</sup> With its 2,000,000 inhabitants, Bamako exceeds by far the 250,000 inhabitants of the second biggest town of Mali (Sikasso). It is the political and economic centre of Mali where most Malians wish to live. It is 'the destination of desire and promise, especially for Mali's young people' (Arnoldi 2007, 19). Most inhabitants of Bamako have a tendency to reduce Mali to its capital and an immense homogeneous space they name '*la brousse*' (bush), a discourse which resonates with the Paris - province simplification made by the inhabitants of the French capital.

This chapter documents my field-site of Bougouni as a shifting place because this increasingly urban area is still marked and “haunted” by a history of marginality. Living in Bougouni means experiencing, a modern town, set up with electricity, tarred road, mobile network (...) and cement houses while, at the same time, being connected to an ambivalent past through its old districts, colonial buildings and bad reputation.<sup>50</sup> The somewhat contradictory identities of Bougouni are first addressed through a song which reflects the past reputation and present transformations of what its composer, the famous local artist Nahawa Doumbia, called the ‘crossroads’ of southwest. Thereafter, I give a short history of the late-Islamisation of Bougouni in order to understand better the origins of its notoriety, the formation of public Islam in Mali as well as the presence of a Mande legacy in local life as I observed it during my 18 months fieldwork there. Then, a tour of the old districts of the town will connect Bougouni to its foundation, its local history and places of memory, and its powerful chieftainship which still shapes local politics. In similar perspective I continue by investigating the colonial imprint found in town. Both periods still inform contemporary dynamics of power. They also stress elements of continuity with the past. The second part of the chapter will explore the recent growth of Bougouni; I illustrate how post-1991 waves of migrants widened the four postcolonial districts of the town, undermined the demographic position of autochthons, and supported alternative views of Bougouni which challenge its bad reputation. Finally, I introduce the three spaces of sociality (*carré*, street and *grin*) in which people spend most of their time in Bougouni. The focus on these open spaces involves an anthropology of street life that is crucial to my analysis of Muslim life in this dissertation.

### ***Past reputation and present transformations***

Nahawa Doumbia, a famous singer born in the village of Mafélé in southwest Mali in 1959, grew up and has lived most of her life in Bougouni.<sup>51</sup> According to local recollection, her mother, who died shortly after her birth, predicted that Nahawa, although the daughter of a blacksmith (*numu*), would perform songs, a profession which is traditionally the realm of *griot* (praise singer and bard, *jeli*).<sup>52</sup> Defying her father, she started to perform locally in the 1970s. Spotted by agents of the Ministry of Culture, she took part in and won *La Biennale de la*

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<sup>50</sup> This analysis of Bougouni is inspired by De Boeck’s mirroring approach to the urban world (2008).

<sup>51</sup> For a documentary of Nahawa Doumbia, see Lecomte (1997).

<sup>52</sup> For further information on Mande statuses, see chapter 3.

*Jeunesse*<sup>53</sup> in Bamako in 1980. Her career then took on a national and even international dimension. She has, however, mostly performed in Mali where she is often called the ‘Queen of Didadi’, a rhythm of the Wassoulou<sup>54</sup> region of southwest Mali on which young people challenge each other during ceremonies and festive evenings. Nahawa is nicknamed ‘child of djinns’ (*jine den*), which she references often in her repertoire; this connection with occult forces makes her an awe-inspiring artist in Mali. Part of her success in Mali is also due to Nahawa’s empathic lyrics which are related to the difficulties of everyday life. Although a star in Mali, she has remained close to ordinary Malians by living in Bougouni (instead of moving to Bamako and the Western world) and by working for twelve years as a nurse in the hospital of Bougouni until recently. She lately wrote a praise song called ‘Bougouni’<sup>55</sup> for her eleventh album which invites the listener to appreciate Bougouni for what it is instead of what people have heard about it (2009). I comment below on a selection of its lyrics in order to discuss the suspicion with which Bougouni is perceived in Mali.

The country of Banimonitié is good; the country of Banimonotié is good [twice].

Bougouni is within Bamanomitié; Bougouni is good. I greet Bougouni [twice].

If your bad reputation precedes your good reputation, this latter remains unknown.

In the lyric above, Nahawa neither refutes nor accepts the bad reputation of Bougouni, but she invites people to look at it nowadays as a place where life is good. Indeed, for the first time in two centuries, the town of Bougouni has become an important centre of migration where Malians from all the country and foreigners are coming in order to build a better life.

I greet Coulibaly of Bougouni. If a stone falls on someone, he is injured. If someone falls on stone, he is injured. Coulibaly are good people.

According to Nahawa Doumbia, however, the current expansion of Bougouni also relies on respecting the value of its autochthons. The *Bamanan* Coulibaly were among the first autochthons of Banimonitié. Nahawa praises them with a play on words: Couli or Coulou means stone (*kulu*) in Bamanankan; Coulibaly are as one, and solid as stone; therefore one should respect them instead of fighting them.

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<sup>53</sup> For an extended study of such youth festivals, see Arnoldi (2006).

<sup>54</sup> Wassoulou region is well known for its music.

<sup>55</sup> See original lyrics in *Bamanankan* in Appendix 1.



There are four kinds of Fula. If a Fula puts on weight, he is not a Fula. If Fula is thin, he is a true Fula. [<sup>56</sup>] I thank Fula of Banimonitié for their hospitality. Fula are good people.

Nahawa moves on by jokingly praising the four Fula families (Diallo, Diakité, Sangaré and Sidibé) who are the second autochthons of Banimonitié. According to local discourses, the Fula arrived in southwest Mali slowly in pre-colonial waves of migration from Northeast Mali (the current *Région* of Mopti). They progressively settled in southwest Mali and took political power due to their military strength. Step-by-step, they abandoned their language and adopted that of their first hosts: the *Bamanankan*. Present-day inhabitants of southwest Mali make jokes with these 'fake Fula' who settled in their villages and married their sisters. They tease them, saying that their *Bamanan* sisters, in turn, taught *Bamanankan* to their Fula children instead of Fula language. Progressively these Fula became farmers and adopted the local life style. Only their patronym remains of Fula origin. Their former hosts say 'they have been "Bamanised"'. *Bamanan* locals express a sort of 'joking relationship'<sup>57</sup> which certifies the alliance between Fula and *Bamanan* there, but question Fula authority by reminding them of the disappearance of a Fula ethos and the longstanding cultural domination of *Bamanan* society characterising southwest Mali.

Some said it has become *l'examen de Bougouni* [twice]. Some said there are many mad people in Bougouni, but it is not true.

Here Nahawa questions the bad reputation of Bougouni within Mali that is expressed in the popular saying about '*l'examen de Bougouni*' (the examination of Bougouni); it is a tale, allegedly based on a true event that happened in the early postcolonial period, which stresses that egoism and jealousy are particularly present in Bougouni. It narrates that an autochthonous sorcerer used his occult power to cause all children to fail in an exam because he did not want his son to fail alone.

Before moving to Bougouni I often heard this popular saying from Malian friends who wanted to warn me about the nastiness of the inhabitants of Bougouni and the high proportion of witches and sorcerers among them. Similarly, Malians frequently pointed to the backward character of Bougouni by mentioning a famous reprimand voiced by the former President Moussa Traoré following the murder of the young *Secrétaire Général* of the *Cercle de*

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<sup>56</sup> The Fula are usually reckoned thin.

<sup>57</sup> For early writing on joking relationships as reciprocal bonds between two groups in West Africa, see Labouret (1929); for a functionalist analysis of joking relationships see Radcliff-Brown (1940; 1949); on joking relationships as strategic means for 'wedging two groups apart while keeping them together' in Djenné (Mali), see Marchand (2003, 60).

*Bougouni* of the single party UDPM<sup>58</sup> in 1987 whose corpse was found a couple of kilometres from Bougouni on the road to Manankoro. This tragic event hit the national headline news and caused the President to come to Bougouni. Moussa Traoré assembled the townspeople in the Sakoro Mery Diakité soccer stadium. Angry, he shouted at the population the following play on words that became a famous saying in Mali: '*Bougouni te ke Bougouba yé!*' (The small hut (Bougouni) is not a big hut (Bougouba)). His meaning, based on a contrast between suffixes *ni* (small) and *ba* (big), is that Bougouni was not a big town and will never be one. Originally, this play on words conveyed the idea that Bougouni cannot be developed because its inhabitants are not civilised; some of them are even murderers. Indeed, when Moussa Traoré delivered his famous reprimand in 1987, the town was still small and looked rather like a big village of mud houses. In 2008-2010, except for autochthonous adults, most youngsters and foreigners I met did not know about the original context of this play on words. They just associated it with the general backward character Bougouni has in Mali.<sup>59</sup>

Both '*L'examen de Bougouni*' and this saying remind to Malians of the bad reputation of Bougouni. Foreigners also think there are many mad men in Bougouni due to immoral schemes of its inhabitants. I heard many others such stories that, I argue, were initially due to the peripherality of southwest Mali, its late-Islamisation, and more recently, to the relative underdevelopment of Bougouni before 1991. But Nahawa sings that things have changed in the last two decades. Development is coming to Bougouni. '*Maisons à étages*' (houses with floors) are now numerous in Bougouni. Its centre was recently tarred and the town hosts numerous NGOs now.

Bougouni is a crossroads.

If you want to find Bougouni, it is located between Côte d'Ivoire and Mali.

It is between Guinea and Mali. It is between Sikasso and Bamako.

I thank the protective djinn of Bougouni. Bougouni and Banimonité are good.

At the end of the song, Nahawa invites listeners to look at Bougouni as a flourishing town which is now a crossroads connected to the wider world.<sup>60</sup> In the predominantly Muslim society of Mali, Nahawa overtly praises the protective djinn of Bougouni who has sustained its recent development by guarding the town against misfortune and curse. Indeed, foreigners said that, although Muslims, the inhabitants of southwest Mali remain attached to a near

<sup>58</sup> *Union Démocratique Populaire du Mali*.

<sup>59</sup> Others mentioned that Moussa Traoré voiced this reprimand when, on his way to Bougouni from Yanfolila, his convoy passed by bushfires.

<sup>60</sup> Put differently, local modalities of cohesion, sociality and development are conversing with more regional and global frameworks; outcomes of such conversations are shaping what AbdoulMaliq calls the 'worlding' of African cities (2001).

'legacy' (*face*) of un-Islamic origins upon which their nastiness is built. Such statements cannot be fully grasped without outlining the late-Islamisation of south Mali, a historic specificity which largely accounts for the bad reputation of Bougouni.

### ***A short history of religious changes in Bougouni***

According to Peterson, Islamisation in this part of rural West Africa was a long-term, gradual and 'drifting' process that took place from below (see 2011). The wars of Samory with their conversion 'at the point of the sword' achieved very little success (Ibid, 49). Islamisation has been rather the progressive outcome of mobile social groups (freed slaves from 1910, colonial soldiers, migrant workers from 1920) who returned to their homeland and introduced prayer into their villages. His findings are mostly right, but nuances need to be added with regard to the peculiar case of Bougouni, the only colonial post in southwest Mali until 1951. Islam in Bougouni was originally brought by Muslim foreigners who settled there during the colonial period. These migrants were mainly composed of civil servants who worked in the colonial administration, and merchants who set up businesses in this roadside trade town. In this way, Bougouni attracted a Muslim elite that induced an Islamisation from above. Within the town, Islam became quickly associated with wealth, power and status. Until the mid-colonial period, Islam was substantially present (in the form of a grouping of Muslims composed of few families) and freely practised within southwest Mali only in the colonial post of Bougouni and several old Muslim trade settlements such as Garalo. These 'Muslim islands' (Ibid, 35) also sheltered newly converted Muslims against the segregation they underwent in their villages. As a colonial centre and roadside town, Bougouni underwent a faster process of Islamisation than its hinterland.

During the colonial period, *Bamanaya* practitioners and Muslims lived together in Bougouni. Islam was not a regulator of public life as it is nowadays. For instance, the town hosted a place called *korokoji* (water of peddlers) where people met around small taprooms and drank local millet beer (*dɔlb*) in public.<sup>61</sup> The two religious practices were less distinct than now. Muslims had very little knowledge of Islam; 'shifting' or 'dual' practices were common among newly converted Muslims as well as among practitioners of *Bamanaya*. According to local elders, some Muslims went to see performances of the *kɔmɔ* initiation society of the

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<sup>61</sup> Nouhoum Doumbia, Bougouni, 17 Nov. 2009.

village of Kola, participated in public *Bamanan* sacrifices asking for rain, and performed Islamic prayers as well.<sup>62</sup> At that time, each practice borrowed elements from the other. Following Peterson ‘even as people began praying and embracing Muslim forms of religious life, the generative cultural grammar, as it were, remained rooted in *bamanaya*’ (Ibid, 13). Within the emerging context of an ‘Islamic sphere’ promoted by colonial peace and the development of a road network (see Soares and Launay 1999), Muslim identity progressively came to be associated with a body of standardised Islamic practices. As elders said ‘those who pray’ (*mɔɔ min bɛ sɛli*) became distinct from ‘those who possess fetish’ (*ɔɔtigi*). In Bougouni, Muslim identity sharpened with the arrival of foreign ‘Muslim scholars’ (*karamɔɔw*)<sup>63</sup> who preached in public (*wajuli*) and instructed in traditional Islamic schools (*duguma kalan*)<sup>64</sup> in the second half of the colonial period.

At the same time the remoteness, poverty and lack of economic opportunities of southwest Mali has promoted mobility among its inhabitants that accelerated their Islamisation. Owing to the introduction of colonial taxes, many inhabitants of Bougouni moved to work in the cash crop economy of the forest and coastal Muslim zones (current Senegal, Guinea and part of Ivory Coast) during the colonial period.<sup>65</sup> Some of these mobile workers returned to their homeland and introduced prayer to their families. Such migratory processes continued in the postcolonial period and reinforced mass-Islamisation in Bougouni. The first *médessa* (Ar. *madrasah*) in Bougouni was opened in 1961.<sup>66</sup> The establishment of such modern Muslim schools, which teach Islamic studies alongside secular subjects with the same pedagogical principles employed in the state schools, undermined traditional Islamic school (see Brenner 2001, introduction). Moreover, such form of schooling opened up Bougouni to wider Islamic influences because it was primarily developed in Mali by local Muslim scholars trained in the Middle East. Although difficult to assess, local elders say that the town became predominantly Muslim during the early postcolonial period; mosques mushroomed during the last two decades. By 2010 more than 30 mosques had been erected in Bougouni. Muslims prayed in 5 different mosques on Friday.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Mamadou Traoré, Bakary Diawarra, Ablaye Diarra, Youssouf Coulibaly, Bougouni, 6 June 2009.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, Lallama Sylla of Bamako who settled in Bougouni in early 1950s.

<sup>64</sup> From the noun ‘*dugu.ma*’ (soil) and the verb ‘*ka kalan*’ (to study); basically, in these traditional Islamic schools (or Qur’anic schools) students (Ar ‘*talibe*’; Bam. ‘*garibu*’) sit directly on the ground and ‘learn’ the Koran ‘by heart’ (*ka durusi kɛ*).

<sup>65</sup> Economic migration was more important in hinterland of Bougouni where cash economy was much less developed (almost nil).

<sup>66</sup> 7 *médersas* were operating in Bougouni in 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Bougouni also hosted a minority of Christians (one Catholic parish and one Protestant seminary). Other religious movements were present in Bougouni such as the Baha’i. The public presence of the non-Muslim community illustrated the *laïcité* of the Malian state (see introduction); however, this non-Muslim community was nevertheless incidental and did not turn out to be a major actor in my fieldwork.

In the hinterland of Bougouni, the region of Cɛmala-Banimonitié suffered ‘very little’ from the wars of Samory; this is partly due to the fact that this area sheltered the Dyula<sup>68</sup> of Garalo who collaborated with Samori and protected their *kafo* (see Peterson 2011, 61). Most of its inhabitants did not undergo a period of enslavement in Muslim areas. Hence, the ending of legal slavery in 1905 did not encourage Islam through the exodus of former slaves there who had become Muslim during their enslavement, as it is the case of villages along the river *Bagoé* which crosses the centre of south Mali (Ibid, 24-57). My enquiries in the hinterland of Cɛmala-Banimonitié suggest that it was, above all, migrant workers involved in the cash crop economies of Senegal (1920-1950) and Côte d’Ivoire (from 1950) who progressively brought Islam there by introducing prayer into their village.<sup>69</sup> First mobile workers moved to seek money in order to be able to pay colonial taxes (*ni.sɔngɔ* which literally means ‘soul price’), bridewealth and new items of consumption (e.g. bicycles, hats, sun glasses); subsequent generations of migrant workers moved, not only for economic reasons, but also to see the civilised world which was mostly represented by the Côte d’Ivoire (see chapter 4). According to a local elder who migrated to Côte d’Ivoire during his youth, ‘it is *yaala* (tour, stroll, circular movement) that brought Islam to Cɛmala-Banimonitié’. Phenomena of mobility have caused religious change and economic development in colonial and postcolonial southwest Mali. In line with recent researches in human geography (Blunt 2007; Bailey 2010), the nature of the relationship between mobility and dwelling in peripheral zones such as southwest Mali demonstrates that remoteness promoted ‘ideologies of mobility’ that ‘reveal the centrality of mobility in shaping what it is to be modern’ (Blunt 2007, 685) there. Islam, like new items of consumption, became a powerful marker of the civilised world. By contrast, the markers of *Bamanaya* turned to be increasingly characterised as backward things of un-Islamic origin.

With religious changes ‘*bamanaya*, or indigenous religious practices, became something shameful’ (Peterson 2011, 3). Peterson’s sentence is right when related to his period of study (1880-1960), but it does not represent an exact picture of the nature of the contemporary relationship between *Bamanaya* and Islam I observed during my fieldwork in southwest Mali. Although practically all people define themselves as Muslim, *Bamanaya* is still present in southwest Mali as practice<sup>70</sup> and as a cultural backdrop. Here, *Bamana.ya* does not only mean the *Bamanan* religion; its suffix *-ya-* evokes also a broad *Bamanan* ‘condition’ or ‘way of life’. Whereas the latter subtly informs the morality of Muslim life (see chapter 3), the former, in addition to representing a shameful past, has been subjected to process of

<sup>68</sup> At that time, being Dyula (or Jula) meant being a Muslim trader (see Amselle 1977).

<sup>69</sup> For a similar but more extensive account of ‘the dialectics of conversion’ through migration in south Mali, see chapter 6 of Peterson’s book (2011).

<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless *Bamanaya* practices diminished. As these practices are now mostly hidden, it is difficult to assess their presence.

demonization which has nurtured the bad reputation of Bougouni. Muslim scholars who accompanied the Islamisation of southwest Mali constantly and severely criticised local religious practices as backward and evil. They aimed at the annihilation of such practices. The public burning of fetishes happened widely in southwest Mali and echoed other African forms of iconoclasm which, in the name of a monotheistic creed, symbolically aimed at creating new social, religious and political orders (see Sarró 2009, 2–6). In this regard, the local religious figure of El-Hajj Ladji Blen (about 1900 -1989) who built with his acolytes the second Friday Mosque of Bougouni epitomises harsh proselytism. Local recollection of his life recounts the victory of the worshippers of God over the *Bamanaya* forces of ‘Satan’ (*sitanε*). According to his biographer (Sissoko 2007),<sup>71</sup> Ladji Blen was born in a village near Bougouni within an ‘animist’ family. He converted to Islam in 1942 during a journey around Senegal and performed the *Hajj* in 1948. He came back to Bougouni in 1952 and started his fight against animist practices, a religious commitment achieved through the destruction of numerous fetishes, idols and power-objects which he pursued until his death.<sup>72</sup> Sissoko explains the life of El-Hajj Ladji Blen as ‘*croisades aux pays des idoles*’ (crusades in idol countries), a sort of holy war against evilness. All Muslim scholars warned people against the un-Islamic nature of *Bamanaya* practices. For them, the worshipping of local djinns was diabolic and led to Hell. In their view, only God must be worshipped. Many newly converted Muslims, however, did not totally abandon their ‘old ways’ (*ko kɔɔ*) because as ‘legacy’ (*face*) they were part of their origin, their identity.

With the advent of Muslim society in Mali, Islam became an important moral authority and a regulatory force that shaped public attitudes in contemporary Mali (see chapter 2). Thus, *Bamanaya* practices have been segregated and are now hidden. As a local old Imam said ‘all the mouths are Muslim’<sup>73</sup> which implied that, for many locals, Islam is just a public identity.<sup>74</sup> Another elder added ‘although you washed your mouth very well, the smell of what you have eaten is still here’.<sup>75</sup> Such thoughts express the fact that most inhabitants of southwest Mali say they are Muslim; indeed Islamisation as process of avowed conversion is nearly completed in southwest Mali. But their *Bamanan* practices still act, nonetheless, out of public sight, such as during a nightly visit to a *soma* (*Bamanan* sorcerer) and in a power-object concealed underneath someone’s cloths. In parallel, the late-Islamisation of southwest Mali is still

<sup>71</sup> At the back of this biography I bought directly from the hands of the Imam of the Ladji Blen Friday Mosque in Bougouni, it is stated that El-Hajj Ladji Blen entrusted Mamadou Sissoko with the ‘*mission sacrée*’ of writing this book. Whether Mamadou Sissoko (born in 1944) was El-Hajj Ladji Blen’s mere friend or close acolyte remains obscure.

<sup>72</sup> This commitment brought him to southwest Mali, the *Région* of Kaye, Senegal and back to Bougouni where he is buried.

<sup>73</sup> *Mɔɔ bεε donna silameya da a la.*

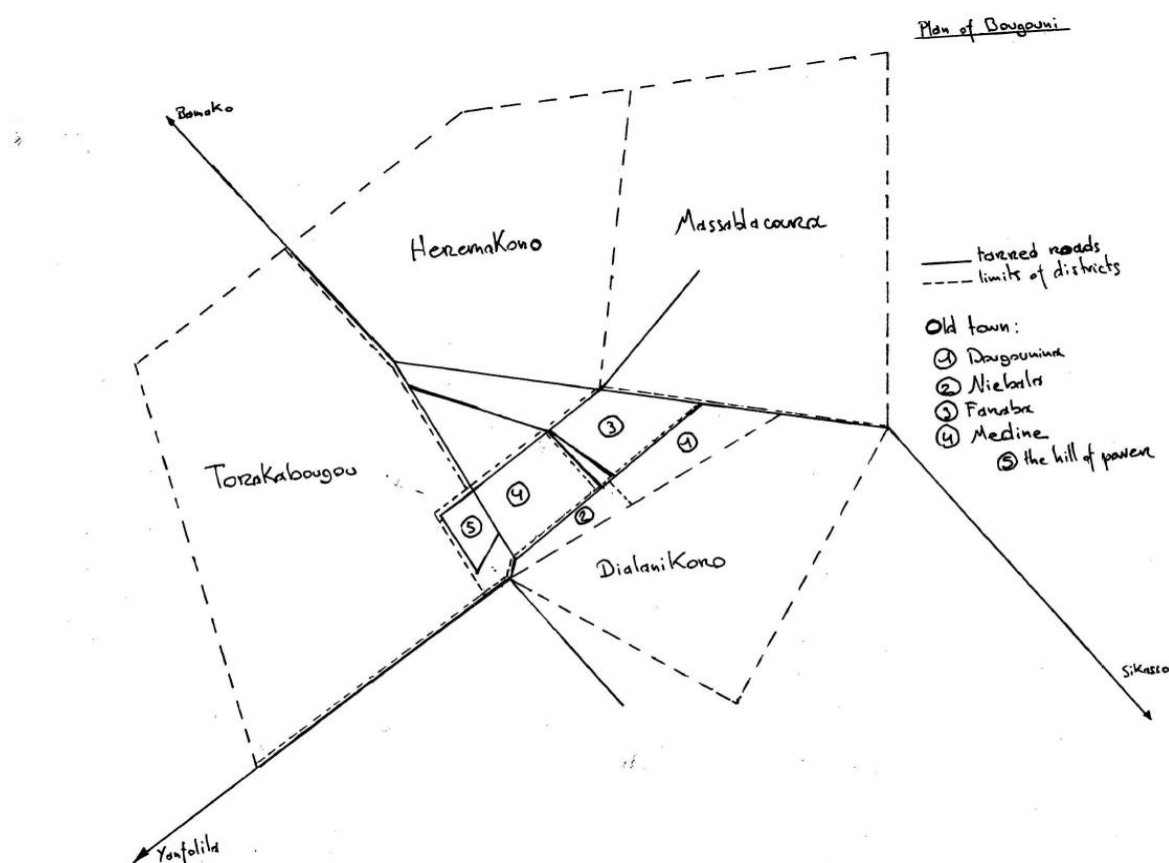
<sup>74</sup> The declaration of religious identity in front of fellow villagers during the colonial census already paved the way to the profession of a public Muslim identity so as to avoid mockery, shame and other negative connotations associated with *Bamanan* identity (Peterson 2002; 2011, 207–210).

<sup>75</sup> *Hali ni ε bε ε da ko koseεε, ε bε min dun, kasa bε a la.*

remembered by foreigners and informs ideas about the bad reputation of Bougouni, the high proportion of '*mauvaises personnes* ' and the sentiments of egoism and jealousy among its inhabitants which I explore in chapter 5.

### ***The old districts***

In 2010, the town was composed of 8 districts, of which Dougounina, Niébala and Faraba are the three oldest. They are mainly populated by descendants of the founders of Bougouni and descendants of Muslim traders who settled in town during the colonial period. These three small districts are now enclosed in the centre of Bougouni (see plan of Bougouni below). They originated in the pre-colonial period and are related to the foundation of Bougouni.



According to local history, Bougouni was initially a lazaretto for smallpox.<sup>76</sup> It is narrated that, in pre-colonial times, a Fula Diakité of Kita<sup>77</sup> moved to southwest Mali and

<sup>76</sup> Small variations exist between versions but they do not affect the main plot exposed in this chapter.

<sup>77</sup> Region of Kayes (Northwest Mali).

became the shepherd of the *Bamanan* Coulibaly of the village of Kola. The Coulibaly hosted him (*jatigiya*)<sup>78</sup> and gave him one of their daughters in marriage. Later, the Fula had to build a lazaretto composed of a small hut (*bugu* [hut]; *ni* [small]) away from the village because members of his family were infected by smallpox. When they recovered, the Fula decided to stay in the small hut where the current district of Dougounina stands. The couple gave birth to children. When they grew up, two sons settled next to their parents and founded the district of Nièbala. A third one similarly established what would be the district of Faraba. The hamlet started to grow slowly and attracted local hunters as well, but it still belonged to the first settlers of the area, the Coulibaly of Kola. The small hut that marked the foundation of Bougouni has inspired the only monument of present-day Bougouni: a small hut made of stones, cement and thatched roof fenced with wire netting that stands in front of the *Conseil de Cercle* of Bougouni at the centre of the town (see photograph 1 below).<sup>79</sup>



Soon after the colonial conquest, the French moved their local administration from Faragouaran to Bougouni in 1894 due to water shortage. Boosted by the opening of the French post and the colonial policy of repopulating villages along the main road from Bamako after the wars of Samori (see Peterson 2011, 62), the village of Bougouni was progressively transformed into a roadside trade town. Its growth was further supported by French decrees prohibiting the slave trade in 1894 throughout the colony that caused runaway slaves to congregate in the 'so-called liberty villages' (French posts) (Ibid, 64). This shift of power encouraged the Diakitè families to sever their links of submission to their hosts, the first

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<sup>78</sup> Host-foreigner relationship.

<sup>79</sup> All photographs of this PhD dissertation by author, unless credited to others.



autochthons and landlords of the area. They took control of land surrounding Bougouni and created their own chieftainship.

In the present-day, the village of Kola stands inconspicuously in the vicinity of Bougouni. The Diakité still hold the chieftainship of Bougouni, and their renowned ancestors inhabit places of memories in town. The Diakité families occupy most of the three oldest districts of the town that constitute the centre of Bougouni. The house of their patriarch (*dugutigji*, chief of village) is strategically located in Dougounina next to the oldest Friday Mosque of the town and its big market. At a short distance from their main house is the tomb of Diakassan Moussa Diakité, a great warrior who, according to the Diakité's oral tradition, converted to Islam and fought for the King of Ségou during the pre-colonial period.<sup>80</sup> The first football stadium of Bougouni situated in Medine district bears the name of his descendant Sakoro Mery Diakité who was *chef de canton* during the colonial period.

The rivalry between the Coulibaly of Kola and the Diakité of Bougouni still shapes contemporary politics. Although the village of Kola and the town of Bougouni are separated by only a five minute ride by motorbike on a tarred road, they do not belong to the same *Commune*. The process of decentralisation in Mali (see introduction) promoted public consultation about the regional subdivision of *Communes* during the 1990s (see Kassibo et al. 1997). These grassroot debates often highlighted local history and resulted in the formation of *Communes* according to ancient affinities and old rivalries (see Toé 1997; Coulibaly and Hilhorst 2004). The village of Kola did not want to join the same decentralised unit as Bougouni and therefore created the *Commune Rurale* of Kola with 8 other villages. But tensions still exist. A land dispute between the chieftainships of the village of Kola and the town of Bougouni ended in dramatic events. Early in the Sunday morning of the 7 June 2009 members and allies of the Diakité families burnt and destroyed several houses constructed in disputed lands. They chased off their occupants arguing that they had not asked permission of the Diakité chieftainship to settle there. According to the sole local newspaper, *Le Relais*,<sup>81</sup> the rampage was led by Diakaridja Diakité, son of the traditional district chief of Dougounina and a former political candidate of the RPM<sup>82</sup> for the National Assembly of Mali. Although under Malian law land belongs to the state, traditional custom is still pervasive. The Diakité family continue to see themselves as the owners of the land. Moreover the *Préfet* and the police did not intervene.

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<sup>80</sup> For further information about the tomb of Diakassan Moussa Diakité, see chapter 4.

<sup>81</sup> See, press article 'Litige foncier. Douze familles saccagées par des Diakité de Bougouni. Le laxisme du Préfet Sankou Touré en cause', in the Bougouni newspaper *Le Relais*, 29 June 2009, 13, Coopérative Jamana, Bamako, 2-3. *Le Relais* was created in early 2000.

<sup>82</sup> *Rassemblement Pour le Mali*.

The Malian law on Decentralisation promoted what Mbembe called ‘the re-enchantment of tradition’ and ‘the rehabilitation of origins and of belonging’ (2000, 37) by giving traditional chieftainship the right of consultation and the task of tax collecting.<sup>83</sup> Here the law legitimises traditional power by including it as part of the decision-making process of the *Commune*; it also enforces it with new fields of financing by granting the traditional chieftainship a share of taxes they collect. The Malian decentralisation in Bougouni, as well as in many other *Communes*, illustrates also how traditional decision-making processes interfere with elected and administrative channels of power. For instance, it is not rare to see in Mali kin of the traditional chieftainship holding *Communal* political offices when their elders hold the traditional chieftainship (see Chappatte 2005). The system of traditional chieftainship belongs to a broad Mande legacy that still pervades local power as well as religious life, as I explore in chapter 3.

### ***The colonial town***

The fourth oldest district of Bougouni is Medine. This enlargement of the town was planned in the colonial period and its division into plots was ordered by Maurice Meker the French *commandant* of the *Cercle* of Bougouni (1947 - 1952) who wrote a memoir containing references to Bougouni (see 1980). Méker also drew up the first urban plan of Bougouni that provided the framework for the postcolonial extension of the town. During the colonial period Medine was called Mékerbougou. On the independence of Mali in 1960 the district changed its name and became Medine. With the expansion of the town this district is now surrounded by new settlements. Part of it also forms the current centre of the town where the hospital of Bougouni stands. Medine also contains colonial cement buildings. Their current use illustrates that in Mali ‘most colonial buildings (...) became the residence or the workplaces of the Malian bureaucracy, thus providing continuity in the geography of power after independence’ (De Jorio 2006, 85).

Medine district ends westwards at the bottom of a hill that reminds locals of ‘*la colline de Koulouba*’<sup>84</sup> in Bamako. This hill, nicknamed ‘*la colline du pouvoir*’<sup>85</sup> by inhabitants of the capital, hosts various ministries and the *Palais de Koulouba*, the former residence of the

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<sup>83</sup> See *Lois et Décrets de la Décentralisation*, Mars 1999, Mission de Décentralisation et des Réformes Institutionnelles, Présidence de la République, République du Mali, Nouvelle Imprimerie Bamakoise, Bamako.

<sup>84</sup> *Kuluba* means ‘big hill’ in *Bamanankan*.

<sup>85</sup> The hill of power.

Governor of French Sudan erected in 1907 which is now the Presidential Palace of Mali. In similar vein, the French *commandant* of Bougouni lived in a big house built in the Sudanese style at the top of the 'hill of power' of Bougouni. This colonial residence overlooking Bougouni is now the house of the *Préfet* of the *Cercle de Bougouni*, the highest representative of the Malian State in town. Other smaller colonial houses stand on the hill. They host families of important state officers such as the *sous-préfet*, the judge, the chief of police as well as various decentralised state services. At the top of the hill other non-colonial buildings extend the concentration of power found there. At the entrance to the tarred road leading to the colonial buildings stands Radio *Kafokan* (the voice of people). This is the local radio of the *Conseil de Cercle* which broadcasts state information and appointments to rural state agents and inhabitants of hinterland of the *Cercle de Bougouni*. In front of the radio stands the antenna of the powerful Orange Mali company that brought mobile phone services to most Malians in 2007 with the introduction of popular credits named 'watermelon' (*zere*) (see chapter 5). Around the 'hill of power' of Bougouni the Malian state recuperates the geography of power of the colonial state. Even fifty years after independence inhabitants of Bougouni still use the colonial title to refer to the *Préfet* of Bougouni in informal discourses as the *commandant* of Bougouni.

At the foot of the same hill towards the tarred road to Yanfolila the Malian state still imprisons its trouble makers in the same place where the colonial jail stood. Next to the prison lie traces of what was the '*cimetière français*' (French cemetery). But Muslims of Bougouni bury their kin in the central cemetery of Bougouni that borders Medine and the postcolonial district of Heremakono.

Apart from Medine, the 'hill of power' and the urban plan of Bougouni that reflects the colonial past of Bougouni, the colonial imprint in southwest Mali in general is felt through its colonial road network which mostly corresponds to the contemporary one. At the exit from Bougouni towards Sikasso, trucks, cars, bicycles, carts and pedestrians still cross the river *Ba* over the colonial bridge which is the biggest colonial structure of southwest Mali. The recent decentralisation reforms in Mali that raised the town of Bougouni to be the *chef-lieu* (administrative centre) of the *Cercle de Bougouni* also broke down Malian territory into *Cercles* that bear the same names and often follow the same territorial demarcation of those of the colonial period.

Bougouni became a roadside town and is now an important regional hub as a result of colonial policy in 1894 that transformed this formerly ordinary village into the only colonial post of southwest Mali, which it remained until 1951 (when the subdivision of Yanfolila was

created). Its current importance is based on its colonial momentum that was incorporated into the structure of Malian state in many ways.

### ***The postcolonial districts and the recent growth of the town***

When I arrived to Bougouni in 2009 what I discovered looked more like a growing middle-sized town than the big village of mud houses visited by Moussa Traoré in 1987. I travelled to Bougouni by coach from Bamako on the 12 December 2008. After an easy 3 hour trip on the newly repaired 170km tarred road from Bamako to Bougouni (financed by EU) I arrived in Bougouni coach station in the evening around 10.30pm. The place was still full of street peddlers, travellers, *cochers* (local brokers) and *gargotes*.<sup>86</sup> I had to make my way through the crowd. My host waved and welcomed me. He then drove me home on the back of his old Yamaha 100. The tarred streets of the town centre, street lights, coaches, taxis and night life (shops, TV, video games) gave me the impression of a dynamic urban locality.

After customary salutations with my host family, I had a walk in the vicinity accompanied by Malik, a fostered teenager who grew up in Côte d'Ivoire but was sent to Bougouni on account of the Ivorian crisis. We headed towards loud *coupé-décalé*<sup>87</sup> music coming from the neighbourhood. A civil wedding party was still going on in an open courtyard. The sandy dance floor was light by a strip lamp fixed at the top of a post next to the DJ. His electronic materials were connected to two car batteries. Children were raising dust by dancing energetically. A bunch of youths wearing elegant western outfits were chatting and smoking cigarettes. In darker spots, others were flirting. Midnight passed. I decided to go to bed.

In the morning, I did my first day tour of the town on the back of a *Jakarta*; an affordable Chinese-made motorbike that became the new sign of success in urban Mali (see chapter 5). My driver Alou, a student of the *Institut de Formation des Maîtres* (IFM)<sup>88</sup> of Bougouni, brought me to what he thought would be the best spots to show a newcomer in Bougouni. We crossed the centre without stopping, passing by the Siraba Togola Auditorium, the *Conseil de Cercle* and the big market. On the way he pointed out to me the new three-floor cement building of the local police. Passing by some opulent houses, we took the exit toward

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<sup>86</sup> Small restaurants composed of a table, a bench and cooking pots.

<sup>87</sup> Popular dance music associated with youth culture, consumption and success which originates from Côte d'Ivoire and the Ivorian Diaspora in Paris in early 2000s, see Kohlhagen (2006).

<sup>88</sup> IFM is a professional state school that attracts more than 1,000 students from all over Mali.

Yanfolila, a tarred road section of 82km built by a Chinese company and inaugurated in October 2008.<sup>89</sup> After one kilometre, Alou stopped in front of a massive football stadium including athletics lanes and VIP boxes. This stadium, which can host international games, was inaugurated in December 2008 by the Malian President and the Ambassador of China in Mali. Next Alou took the exit towards Bamako and pointed out to me an Indian-owned cotton seed oil factory Alcoma where more than two hundred locals have worked since 2007. After my first 24 hours in Bougouni, I realised the town was expanding towards spaces and with dynamics that went beyond its traditional mud houses and its notoriety.

Bougouni was raised to a *chef-lieu* of the *Cercle de Bougouni* in 2000 as part of the Malian decentralisation reform. As a result, Bougouni hosts many administrative services and provides health (3 CSCOM<sup>90</sup> and 1 *Centre de Référence*<sup>91</sup>) and school services (1 high school, 5 professional schools) that bring qualified workers, civil servants and students to town. As an important regional town, Bougouni offers jobs for intellectuals and qualified workers who work in the NGOs, radios,<sup>92</sup> hotels (...) found there. With the presence of a growing local elite, Bougouni also offers prestigious services such as one bank with a cash machine,<sup>93</sup> 3 modern petrol stations,<sup>94</sup> 3 internet cafés, various private schools (including 2 high schools) and 3 private clinics and 6 hotels. Bougouni also contains two modern bakeries and series of big shops (clothing and food). Canal + Group (TV channels) and Orange Mali (telecommunication) also set up in town recently with the opening of official outlets.

My host family belongs to the category of intellectual elite that moved here because of the growing services sector in Bougouni. The head of the family, a retired professor of mathematics and physics, comes from Kita. He moved to Bougouni 30 years ago and had a distinguished career teaching in Bougouni. He died in April 2009. His wife, also from Kita, worked in the Bougouni Post Office. She retired following the death of her husband, a humble man who had welcomed me with open arms. During their career they managed to build a cement house in Bougouni where they decided to settle for good. Their children grew up in Bougouni, but are now spread all over Mali. In fact, my host's family represent second generation migrants in a town most of the inhabitants of which are first generation migrants who settled there after 1991. During my stay in Bougouni I met many people; however few among them were born in Bougouni. In three decades the demographic structure and size of

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<sup>89</sup> This section was financed by Chinese and Malian states.

<sup>90</sup> *Centre de Santé Communautaire*.

<sup>91</sup> Small hospital.

<sup>92</sup> 4 radios were operating in 2010. 2 other radios were planned.

<sup>93</sup> BNDA (*Banque Nationale de Développement Agricole*). Inhabitants started to complain about the lack of banking services. Other banks are prospecting the town.

<sup>94</sup> Total recently built what is the biggest petrol station of Bougouni which stands near the two cotton factories of the CMDT (*Compagnie Malienne de Développement du Textile*).

Bougouni changed radically from a big village dominated by its autochthons to a middle-sized town where migrants are in majority.

During the postcolonial period Bougouni extended into four new districts: Massablacoura (where I lived), Heremakono, Torakabougou and Dialanikoro. They are large areas mostly inhabited by migrants. Due to its distance from the centre of the town, Torakabougou possesses its own food market and Massablacoura a chicken market. Demographic growth has been accompanied by inflation in land prices in the centre of the town. Hence people are now buying building plots in these new districts, the edge of which are now more than 30 minutes walk from the centre. Some such as Amidou, a teacher in the village of Kèlèya, bought a building plot for his future retirement and his children. Others invested in housing to provide a reliable rental income. The four new districts of Bougouni illustrate the emergence of an economic elite who invest their wealth in the building of opulent houses. They also depict how most Malian households struggle over the construction of their cement houses, the sign par excellence of success in life in Mali at the beginning of this century. The purchase of a building plot is usually directly followed by the construction of a well, without which, the plot can be threatened with sale to someone else. The informal rule stipulates that a plot without concrete investment belongs to nobody in particular in Mali. Then the buyer starts to build his cement house step by step. The first stage is to construct the groundwork, thereafter the wall and eventually the roof with optional iron structure for the second floor. This building process can take years. It is a life-time project for most Malian households. The rapid expansion of the town is also accompanied by corruption and illegal housing schemes. Real estate business involves powerful actors, big money and all sorts of negotiations. It is not rare to hear stories of building plots sold to more than one owner. Land disputes between the traditional chieftainship and communal authorities have punctuated the urbanisation of Bougouni. Entrepreneurs in construction are among the richest people in Bougouni.

For others Bougouni is definitively urban because of its night life, a perspective I explore in chapter 7. As they said 'Bougouni is a town because of the presence of night activities'. Thanks to electricity, many small shops, workshops and *gargotes* are open until late in the night. By contrast village life stops soon after the night appears. A grocery, sewing shop, *gargote*, *essencitigi*<sup>95</sup> and a table football stood next to my home at the crossroad between two streets. This bunch of shops enlivened the neighbourhood until midnight every day. Tailors completed clothes in their workshop. Children played table football. Motor vehicles stopped to

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<sup>95</sup> Small petrol station.

buy petrol, and those who felt peckish ordered something in the *gargote*. But the most crowded shop was the grocery. Its owner brought a TV out each evening where a sort of night *grin*<sup>96</sup> gathered and chatted. Many small shops (grocery, *dibiterie* (butcher shop), *gargote*, *shefantigi* (tea-coffee-omelette shops), *cigarettitigi* (seller of cigarettes), video games spots and night *grins* were situated along main streets which had street lighting. The coach station and its vicinity stayed open for night coaches from Sikasso that stopped in Bougouni after midnight every day. I quickly located a couple of spots where food, cigarettes and beverages could be found round-the-clock. Bougouni also witnessed numerous *balani* events in the evening (7pm - 12pm); a sort of noisy mobile discotheque set on the street for various reasons (joyful events, youth association). The town also had the Siraba Togola auditorium and a youth centre that organised artistic events (concert, theatre, and dance) in Bougouni from time to time and during Muslim celebrations. But the peak of night life for the trendy youth and party-men of Bougouni remained the Saturday night dancing parties in Alcatraz, the only modern discotheque in southwest Mali. Otherwise, the town of Bougouni also hosted a hidden network of *maquis* (local pubs) and brothels that offered beers, whisky and sex away from public scrutiny.

### ***Spaces of sociality: carré, rue, grin***

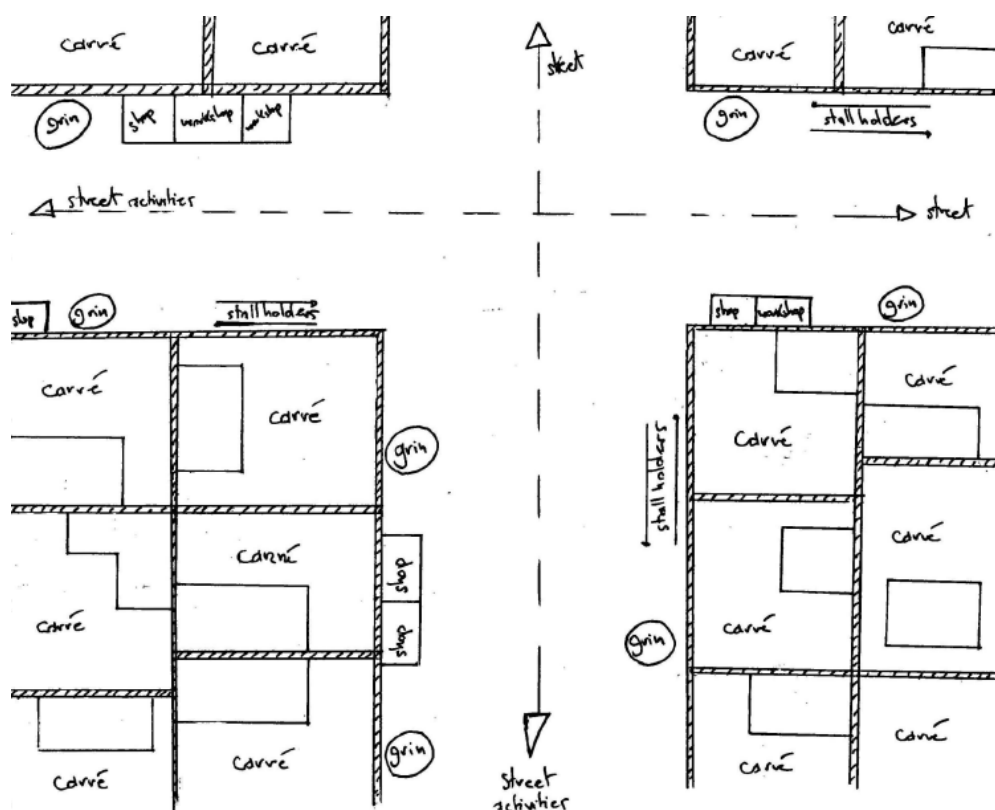
Since the 1990s urban studies have tended to associate towns with processes of globalisation and modernity (see Appadurai 1996; Robertson 1995; Sassen 2002). Following this insight, numerous scholars have explored the logics of flow that shape big towns, such as those illustrated in the study of the 'social life' of Sebago shoes which are distributed by Senegalese traders settled in Dakar and New York (Scheld 2003). However, the anthropologist Mathieu Hilgers, who wrote an ethnography of the middle-sized town of Koudougou in Burkina Faso, rightly reminds us that urbanites still live in places (see 2009, 46–57). Put differently, while the urban is the locus of global flows par excellence, urbanites are still involved in and shaped by local life. This is especially the case for small and middle-sized towns because they are less connected to global flows than big towns.

The fact that Bougouni is perceived as a crossroads does not cut its inhabitants off from local life. On the contrary, in the course of my fieldwork I realised the centrality of street

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<sup>96</sup> On *grin*, see next section.

life to people's lives. An anthropology of street life will be crucial to understanding Muslim life in this dissertation. I opted for an 'anthropology of street life', instead of an 'anthropology of the street' or 'street anthropology', because I do not set out to question the mechanisms of capitalism by studying those who live on the fringes of the street, such as homeless, unstable poor people and street dwellers (see Margaretten 2009; Sekine 2011). What I want to highlight is that people in Bougouni do not spend the day indoors in their house, car and office. Their daily life is mostly based on outdoor activities in courtyards, neighbourhoods and in town. People spend most of their time in three spaces of sociality (*carré*, street and *grin*) which shape a sort of 'outdoor living room'<sup>97</sup> and, at the same time, a working place as I explain below. My aim is to demonstrate that these open spaces contribute to the ordering of social relations and practices by making quotidian activities observable (see plan of urban street life below). Nonetheless, the surveillance of movement and the body in space does not reduce my analysis to simply noting strategies of social control; people also use 'tactics' (Low and Lawrence-Zúniga 2003, 32) so as to take advantage of life's visibility through ostentatious practices (see chapter 2 and 5), and to bypass its constraints through nighttime activities (see chapter 7). As these spaces of sociality are common to all Malian towns, such findings go beyond Bougouni.



<sup>97</sup> In his analysis of Brasília as a city without street, Holston compares common Brazilian street corners to outdoor living rooms (1989).



## Le carré

Traditionally the Malian family (*gwa*) follows patrilocal and patrilineal rules. It is composed of the head of family, his wife (or wives), their children, the wife (or wives) of their sons, and their grandchildren who all share the same courtyard. The *gwa*, what Malians call 'the extended family', is widespread in villages. Malians in town still stick to the above custom (*laada*), but they tend to constitute smaller versions of *gwa*, because mobile practices and urban processes have undermined the authority of the head of family and the unity of the traditional family. Thus the urban district is divided into households (*du*) that vary between the traditional extended family and smaller units such as the nuclear family. Each household inhabits a space enclosed by a wall (of mud, brick) that gives a sense of intimacy to its members. This space, commonly named after its shape (*le carré*),<sup>98</sup> is composed of building(s) and a vast courtyard.<sup>99</sup> During the day people do not spend much time in buildings which are mostly used as dormitory and shelter for the night. With the heat of the sun the air inside the house tends to be stifling during the day. Malians are also abandoning their traditional thatched roofs for sheet metal ones which bake the inside of the house. Social life happens within the courtyard where people spend most of their time when they are at home. The courtyard is usually split into zones (kitchen, laundry, corral and playground) and the washroom stands in one of its corners. Everyday life in *le carré* unfolds around meals, chats, naps, comings and goings, and prayer. It is also structured by gender. Women usually stay home where they do all household chores and take care of children, only going outside to market, to attend a wedding, or a baptism, or to greet someone.<sup>100</sup> Men eat at home, and take a nap, but otherwise spend their time on various activities in town. Family members often gather together in the shade of a big tree<sup>101</sup> after lunch for chats and in front of TV after dinner (see photographs 2 and 3 below).



<sup>98</sup> The square.

<sup>99</sup> With demographic growth, the price of a building plot is increasing and its size decreasing.

<sup>100</sup> Women can also be involved in the local economy (see Chapter 7).

<sup>101</sup> Mango tree are well known to have thick leaves that produce fresh shade.

Although *le carré* represents what is the Malian private space, it is still framed by shared activities and subjected to collective sight.<sup>102</sup> Moreover the main entrance is open to comings and goings of many kinds. People come to greet the family, to ask for someone in particular. These meetings occur without invitation. As is customary, the foreigner is always welcomed with a seat and a glass of water. What was planned as a short visit often extends to the next meal for the person who does not know how to say 'no'. Although enclosed by a wall, *le carré* is an open space during the day because people freely move in and out of it. As such *le carré* is a porous space where the private and the public are always merging. At the end of the day when the head of family and his wife (or wives) go to bed, lights are switched off and doors shut. But cunning teenagers, students and young unmarried adults still find a way to join the night life in Bougouni and to be involved in illicit practices out of the public gaze of the day (see chapter 7).

### ***La rue (the street)***

Each cluster of *carré* is separated by a grid of streets. Except for main streets, most of them are unsurfaced and do not have street lights. Urban streets are important places of sociality in many ways. The street façades (the walls of *carrés* alongside the street) are usually punctuated by commercial units in which locals set small retail stores and workshops. At the sides of the street, some run shops '*par terre*' (street-vendors, stallholders) while others come together in *grin* spots where groups scrutinise and comment on the comings and goings of other people. The street façades and the sides of the street shape an economy of the pavement (see chapter 4) where leisure and business intermingle. Some hail street peddlers to come closer. Others wink at young women (*sungurunw*) on their way to school. A shopkeeper greets an elder on his way home with respect. The donkey cart driven by a farmer, the Jakarta of a student, and the 4x4 of a patron (among other vehicles) circulate on the streets. Traffic moves slowly because of the uneven surface and holes of sandy streets. All these comings and goings animate street life and dynamise social life between families in the neighbourhood; they also nurture gossip among its inhabitants. Life on urban streets is articulated around prestigious ostentation and moral evaluation of the behaviour and dress of passers-by; it constitutes the foreground of public morality. When stepping out of the *carré* someone enters into public space where

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<sup>102</sup> Better-off families might have big houses, but it is still very rare that a room is occupied by one person only.

his/her manner and clothing cannot avoid public scrutiny and moral evaluation; these are part of the social life of street and shapes someone's reputation (*danbé*) in the neighbourhood and beyond. People say that what happens outside the *carré* mirrors what happens inside the *carré*. Therefore someone's behaviour affects the honour (*danbé*) of his elders and his household as well. The street is also space of celebration where families welcome parents, friends and the neighbourhood under a big tent with music and foods during baptisms and weddings (see photographs 4 and 5 below). Finally from the street, pedestrians observe and envy the new cement and multiple storey buildings of the new-rich families.



### *Le grin*

The *grin* is an important element of urban social life.<sup>103</sup> According to Schulz, it is an informal male group based on friendship and neighbourhood connections which 'cuts across divides of socio-economic background, age, occupation and educational background' (2002, 811).<sup>104</sup> The men meet on a daily basis at home or at the working place of the leader of their *grin*, usually the one who can afford to provide sugar and tea for the group. The *grin* is the place where men can address concerns to people outside the control of their parents and their household. There they drink tea, play cards, listen to music and, more importantly, they talk (*baro*). Women can spend some time in the *grin* on their way to the market, but they usually do not linger there. Men wave to them and they sit for a couple of minutes. Then they move on.<sup>105</sup> As analysed by Schultz, the dimension of *baro* - 'talk-as-action' - is the cornerstone of the *grin* that bring men together and forges their sociality (Ibid, 812). Overall, Schulz's definition of *grin*

<sup>103</sup> On *grin* as element of rural social life, see Jonsson (2007).

<sup>104</sup> While *grins* are heterogeneous in composition, their members generally share a common marital status (see Schulz 2002, 811).

<sup>105</sup> For a debate about women's *grin* in Mali, see Chapter 7.

resonates with what I observed in Bougouni. However, nuances need to be made when considering the pluralisation of activities, identities and the formation of an urban elite found in Mali. Although the *grin* gathers members beyond social divisions, this aspect is diminishing in town. People tend to meet in *grin* according to their age, their activities, their marital status and economic power. For instance, during my early period in Bougouni I spent time with a *grin* of youths who were renowned for their night life. Next to them, a group of teachers had their *grin* as well. Others became friends and set up a kind of *grin* consisting of regular sitting in front of the TV of the local shopkeeper. In this way, membership in a *grin* can vary greatly, from a group bound by a common criterion to a loose group sharing time in front of the same TV. Moreover *grins* are not stable spaces of sociality; they do and undo over time, because people move from one *grin* to another one during the same day, and because one can be a member of several *grins* at the same time. In addition, some *grins* meet in day time, others are night *grins*. *Grins* are shaped by heterogeneous causes, but all are important spaces of sociality where people talk, exchange and debate.<sup>106</sup>

Talking is punctuated by the drinking of tea which is a daily ritual for many Malians.<sup>107</sup> The tea maker puts 25gr. of green tea in a teapot and boils it for a long time (10 - 40 minutes). Then he adds lots of sugar, and serves it in small cups. The ritual is started again with the same tea leaves a second time and a third time. In this way, the first tea service is strong and bitter. It is the tea of men and guests which wakes them up and gives them strength. The second infusion is mild and slightly bitter. The third one is light and sweet. It is the lady's tea. If you sit and wait here until the third tea is served, more than one hour will have gone by. Between tea services, people kill the time.<sup>108</sup> They, not only socialise, but also watch and comment on movements of pedestrians, and vehicles on the street.

Given that most people struggle to find full-time livelihoods, they spend time in *grins* along the streets where life flows '*dɔɔni-dɔɔni*' (step by step, slowly). These *grins* are good spots to have fun and to scrutinise and gossip about the comings and goings on the street. Meeting, joking and gossiping are dimensions of *grin* stressed in a popular Malian TV series called *Le Grin*, which shows life in a *grin*: ordinary Malians sit by the side of a street, drink tea, exchange, chitchat in *Bamanankan* about daily life matters and interact with passers-by in humorous manner.<sup>109</sup> Social activities in *grins* nurture comments and moral evaluations of

<sup>106</sup> As representing both a culture of chatting and an open place, the *grin* is an important element of Malian social life which resonates with the tea shop *adda* of central Calcutta (see Chakrabarty 2000, 180–213).

<sup>107</sup> Many Malians are tea addicts. If they cannot drink it they have a headache. Usually the first tea round is made after breakfast and the second one after lunch. Some add a third round (up to a fourth round) in late afternoon and during the evening.

<sup>108</sup> Elders sometimes criticise the *grins* of youth. They say the youth are lazy because they prefer to sit, talk and drink tea instead of working (see chapter 2 and 7).

<sup>109</sup> See *le grin* in YouTube.

street life in Bougouni. Such *grins* are the eyes and ears of *Radio Trottoir* that convey street happenings to households (see photographs 6 and 7 below).



## 2. Public Islam, street life and ordinary Muslim in southwest Mali

One evening in May 2009 I was sitting in a *grin* by the side of the tarred road that runs between Medine and Dialanikoro Districts. This main road has street lamps and passers-by frequent its several shops and *grins* that stay open late into the night. As usual, I was spending my evening drinking tea, chatting with friends, and observing the night life around me. Around 10.30pm we noticed a well-groomed man wearing a clean white robe and sunglasses, with Islamic prayer beads around his neck, walking along the street. He was coming towards us while chanting in *bamanankan*, 'God is protection. God is help. God is cover.'<sup>110</sup> Arriving at the *grin*, he stopped, looked around, then stared at a group of young women (*sunguruw*) sitting in the shadow of a big mango tree on the other side of the road. He spoke vociferously, 'Women put newborn in toilets.'<sup>111</sup> Mothers are sleeping when their daughters are outside during the night. Women whiten their skin. I do not understand!' Reactions within the *grin* were mixed. Some shrugged; some smiled and responded 'this is true';<sup>112</sup> others just listened carefully. Afterwards, this odd person started to dance to hip-hop and reggae music coming from someone's mobile phone. A couple of youths gathered around him. They encouraged his performance by clapping their hands together. Suddenly he stopped, pointed skywards, and said, 'Obama and the White House fear me because I can trigger the Third World War by planting something in the soil.' Everybody around started to laugh out loud! One person thanked him and bought him an ice cream from the neighbouring shop, after which he continued his night walk along the streets of Bougouni, repeating 'God is protection. God is help. God is cover'.

This strange character is well-known in Bougouni and reminds people that Islam means more than prayer and fasting. According to local recollection, he was a promising and even gifted student of Islamic studies who had attained a good level of competence in Arabic language and knew about some esoteric aspects of Islam. When asking a favour of God during long, lonely and demanding sessions of prayer, running the prayer beads between his fingers (*ka wurudi ke*), he lost control of himself and fell into madness (*fatɔya*) from which he has never recovered fully. Many interpreted his madness to be the result of occult forces which unsettled his mind during his prayers to God, so that he lost his way. He had asked God for powerful forces that only pious, 'old men' (*cekɔɔbaw*) can handle. Haste and immoderate ambition had led him onto the path of madness, but his insanity gives him the ability to catch

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<sup>110</sup> *Ala yé sutara yé.*

<sup>111</sup> On infanticide accusation in Bougouni, see newspapers *Le Relais*, August 2008, 3 ; and 30 Octobre 2008, 5, Coopérative Jamana, Bamako.

<sup>112</sup> *O yé cɛn yé.*

glimpses of an invisible world that ordinary Muslims do not see. Therefore, people also fear and listen to him because, as a member the *grin* said this very evening, ‘even if he is mad he can sometimes tell the truth.’<sup>113</sup>

This anecdote shows that Islam is conceived as a multi-dimensional phenomenon in Mali. Certainly, it involves a set of rituals, public signs and moral discourses that shape social life; but it also involves an inner force that informs someone’s personality, maturity and blessedness (*barika*).<sup>114</sup> Most Muslims conceive of piety as both the practice of Islamic precepts, and as self-discipline (virtuous ethos). This twofold nature of piety as a thread running through Muslim life in Bougouni and southwest Mali provides the theme to the analysis I develop in this chapter.

This anecdote also illustrates that the interplay between practice and its virtue is, however, not straightforward and is subjected to criticism.

### ***The problem of intentionality in the practice of public piety***

The debate over the sincerity of the *seere* in Mali illuminates the ambivalence intrinsic to the twofold nature of piety. The *seere* is ‘the dark, sometimes circular, spot or mark on some Muslims’ foreheads (...), the mark indexes regular prayer beyond the obligatory five ritual daily prayers and presumably appears on the forehead from touching the ground during prayer’ (Soares 2004, 206). Thus the *seere* indexes piety. Nonetheless it is frequent that Muslims question the ‘moral character’ of its bearers when they are accused of ‘charges of corruption, embezzlement, or illicit sexual activities’ (Ibid, 222). I also met Muslims who accused some bearers of *seere* to have intentionally created it in order to make people think they are pious.<sup>115</sup> Then what can we learn from the questioning of the validity of *seere* as a norm of piety? Soares states ‘it is perhaps unwise for the anthropologist to speculate about the intentionality of actors’ (Ibid, 222) and concludes by asserting the existence of publicly recognised signs of piety. Soares is right in stating that public signs of piety exist in Mali, but I would like to go one step further. Whatever the intentionality of actors the debate over the sincerity of the *seere* as an index of piety and its duplicity in Mali demonstrates the

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<sup>113</sup> Madness in Mali is often understood as incoherent and shameless behaviour punctuated by special gifts such as telling the truth and foretelling the future. Mad persons do not live in separate institutions. The mad live freely within Malian society, either with their families, or on the street.

<sup>114</sup> From *Baraka* (Arabic language).

<sup>115</sup> ‘Some even speculate that many Malians will rub something on the forehead – even a stone – until such a mark appears’ (Soares 2004, 221).

ambivalence intrinsic to the twofold nature of piety. The *seere* means - proof - in *Bamanankan* (see Bailleul 1996). As proof the *seere* is notwithstanding one that can be “falsified” for mundane purposes. Whereas the outwards signs of Islam indicated the presence of a Muslim identity, they do not automatically certify piety because they can be duplicated by insincere intentions for mundane purposes. The intention is by nature inward and, as Muslims say, only known by God; therefore its content through outwards signs of Islam is subjected to criticism and moral evaluation.

As the motives for practising Islam are numerous, the analyst needs to explore ‘the larger context in which such an [intention] is desired or the social consequences of choosing such an [intention]’<sup>116</sup> (Haniffa 2008, 11). A focus on the notion of intention allows the analyst to explore the relation between outward signs of piety (appearance) and inward states of mind (moral world). Instead of analysing how religion subordinates subjects to its precepts, a focus on intention explores ‘the formation of subjectivities’ so as to ‘understand how people (try to) act on the world as they are acted upon’ (Ortner 2005, 41). The debate around the problem of intentionality in the practice of public signs of piety in Mali involves an anthropology of ethics and freedom for two main reasons: to widen the potential motives supporting the practice of allegedly outward signs of piety; to explore how the complexities of personal subjectivities give rise to the practice and display of public signs of piety for mundane purposes. I do not say Muslims can stand “outside Islam”, but the fact that people’s attitude towards public norms of piety can be ambivalent show how Muslims engage with rituals, public signs and moral discourses in complex and reflexive manners which deserve to be explored.

The debate around the problem of intentionality in the practice of public signs of piety links the study of piety with the intricacies of everyday life. This living approach to Muslim life goes beyond the idealism of the Islamic dogma. When we investigate the making of virtuous life, the challenge is not to abolish the ambivalence of everyday life. On the contrary, the task is to take into consideration ‘the complex and often contradictory nature of everyday experience’ (Schielke 2009a, 26). Paraphrasing Ewing in Schielke’s work I assert that the analyst should not fall into the ‘illusion of wholeness’ that tends to over-emphasis of coherence and perfection of religious experience (ibid).<sup>117</sup> Taking a Platonic perspective, only the idea of piety as an intelligible reality is absolutely pure and eternal. However, social anthropology does not explore the world of ideas in itself, but its daily negotiation framed by moral choices and self-interested aims. As Marsden observed, the Qazi, pretended living

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<sup>116</sup> I replaced ‘self’ by [intention] because of the encompassing character of the notion of self I find difficult to pinpoint ethnographically.

<sup>117</sup> The ability to shift between contradictory sets of views without being troubled by them: on illusion of wholeness, see Ewing (1990).



symbol of pure piety, expresses also 'inconsistencies' by making sexy jokes during public sermons in the mosque, and by showing his 'playful' appearance (smart clothes, slick haircuts, and expensive perfumes) in public (Marsden 2007a, 5–6). How then do Muslims reflect upon discrepancies between the twofold nature of piety in Mali?

*Bamanan* language does not have a word for 'good Muslim', or an adjective for 'pious'. When I asked my fieldwork assistant to translate '*vrai musulman*' (true Muslim) into the vernacular, he replied by saying '*silame yere yere*'. The term '*yere*' is a particle of insistence that expresses the idea of absolute and legitimate (see Bailleul 1996). It can stress any word. For instance, true friend becomes *terike yere yere*. Most people simply say of a bad Muslim that 'he is not Muslim' (*silame*<sup>118</sup> *te*) and of a good Muslim, 'he is Muslim' (*silame don*). The intonation of their voice completes the intensity of their moral evaluation.

Local conceptions of the Islamic path, however, illustrate how most Muslims recognise the struggle for the making of a proper Muslim life. According to local discourses, being Muslim is synonymous with respect and virtue, but this does not mean that the Muslim is perfect. As my friend Alou the teacher explained:

'The Muslim is the one who sins and asks for forgiveness. The true Muslim is the one who never sins. According to the Qur'an, the true Muslim is called *mu'min*.<sup>119</sup> This latter is extremely rare among Muslims.'

Alou's saying resonates with most local discourses I heard about Muslim life in Bougouni. For many, the figure of *mu'min* is more an ideal-type than a reality, and the reality they observe around them differs from this ideal-type. Reflecting upon Muslim life, Abdramane the street peddler stated: 'We are like a scales. On one side we collect *barajiw* (divine awards). On the other side we amass *jurumu* (sins)'. In this way, Muslims recognise human weakness and earthly challenge as inherent to the making of a proper Muslim life. Their view of the Muslim path is realistic and pragmatic and takes into consideration the roughness of everyday life. For them, all Muslims debate about piety. Some understand it more through the practice of precepts; others put more emphasis on Islamic virtues; but eventually Muslims agree to assert that only few among them live it. It is in this somewhat elusive religious scope than someone's religious experience is constantly assessed.

Most anthropologists who have studied the practice of piety in Islam have investigated specific piety reformist movements such as the grassroots women's piety movement in the

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<sup>118</sup> *Silame* signifies Muslim. *Mori* means Muslim too, but this latter also refers to *marabout*.

<sup>119</sup> The believer (Arabic language).

mosques of Cairo (Mahmood 2005), the Muslim women's *da'wa* preaching group – Al Muslimaat in Sri Lanka (Haniffa 2008), and the Minhajul Quran organisation in Pakistan (Philippon 2006). Other anthropologists have focused instead on the existence of numerous ways of being Muslim by demonstrating how Muslims are active and creative in an intellectual and sensual way (Hirschkind 2006; Marsden 2005); others have also focused on phenomena of “new Muslims” (or “postcolonial Muslims”) as the outcome of a process whereby the growth of secular education, the expansion of a public sphere and new mediums of communication have resulted in a change in the sociology of Islamic knowledge which reduced the dependence of Muslims towards religious leaders in term of religious authority (Eickelmann and Anderson 2003; Schulz 2003; Soares 2005a). Following this increasing objectification of Islam in the private and public domain, two recent works explore the increasing engagement of Muslim women in religious debates and experiences in Niger (Masquelier 2009) and in Mali (Schulz 2012). Overall, anthropological researches on Islam nevertheless conceive the notion of piety as being the domain of reformist piety movements, Islamic revival groups and religious leaders. However, what might piety involve for the overwhelming majority of Muslims in their everyday lives? Ordinary Muslims I met in Mali too face pious concerns in their life. As I will explore later in this chapter, in Mali, piety is discussed by people from a wide variety of backgrounds; it is an open and complex notion which is not only captured by focusing on discourses of reformist movements, Islamic revival groups and religious leaders. The problem of piety is not a binary one related to specific religious affiliations; the Western analyst should not contrast secular goals with pious ones. On the contrary, my aim is to study the interplay between Muslim identity, pious concern and mundane interests. Finally, in the study of piety as religious experience I argue for ‘democratisation’ of piety to Muslims in general because pious concerns are not exclusive to religious elites and Islamic revival movements.

### ***The pluralisation of Islam in Bougouni***

Mostly based on Brenner's approach to identity as ‘a process of naming: naming of self, naming of others, naming *by* others’, I explore ‘the process of Muslim identity-building in the broader political context of contemporary [Bougouni and beyond<sup>120</sup>]’ (1993b, 59). In this way each category is identified in relation to other categories. It also refers to changing religious

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<sup>120</sup> I replaced ‘Mali’ by ‘Bougouni and beyond’.

orientations and modes and markers of piety instead of fixed criteria. Therefore the reader should bear in mind that the process of naming intentionally involves fluid and incomplete categories, and their definite meanings are situational. In line with Brenner (1993b), I argue that the process of naming reflects more social representations shaped through interactions rather than notions of essence.

Certain historical religious centres of Mali are still characterised by the presence of prominent religious leaders and their network of followers who have managed to keep at bay other more recent Islamic currents. For instance, the two Sufi orders (Hamawiyya and Tijaniyya) of Nioro-du-Sahel dominate the Islamic sphere there and prevent other Islamic influences taking root in town (see Soares 2005a). However, Bougouni is not an historical religious centre of Mali; there is no religious monopoly that restricts its Islamic sphere. Following the new civic liberties brought by the events of 1991 in Mali, Bougouni, like many Malian towns, has undergone a process of religious pluralisation. The town has become the religious crossroads of southwest Mali where many Islamic currents are present.

At the beginning of my stay in Bougouni, my host father once recounted me an anecdote about events witnessed recently in the mosque:

‘The other day the *pieds-nus* (barefoots) visited the mosque. They are a grouping of fundamentalists who wear traditional cotton cloths. They proclaimed that there are 73 Islamic religious paths, but only one, theirs, leads to God. I disagree because Islam cannot be reduced to one path’.

This anecdote about Islamic path(s) points to the numerous discrepancies and tensions separating Muslims in Bougouni. Muslims debate the legitimacy of religious authority and the nature of its legitimacy. Piety, as an important element (among others) of religious legitimacy, is therefore contested among Muslims. Disagreements over its meaning have resulted in several ways of being Muslim. With regards to Bougouni, Muslims tend to divide its Islamic landscape into five different categories I describe below. The first four categories concern Islamic currents that refer to distinct affiliation and religious leaders. The fifth one is related to the broad category of ordinary Muslim.

The above anecdote refers to the ‘barefoots’. It is a Muslim movement that was founded by Cheick Ibrahim Kalil Kanouté in the 1980s in Mali. According to its founder, the true Muslim should live the same way the Prophet Muhammad did; thus his followers must refuse any technology subsequent to the life of Muhammad. As a consequence, they do not drive any motorised vehicles and do not wear modern shoes. It is why they have been nicknamed ‘barefoots’. Sometimes barefoots are also called ‘*sirawo*’ (the path of hole) because

it is commonly said that the founder of this movement developed this peculiar Islamic path during years he lived in the hole of a big tree. His followers also wear traditional hand woven cotton cloths and refuse modern medicines (among other common traits). Women are confined to the house (chores and child rearing) and men mostly farm. Their strict discipline of life has prompted clashes with civil servants who consider them as rebellious citizens because of their rejection of modern services (e.g. vaccinations). A few conflicts even ended in tragedy.<sup>121</sup> Considered as rebellious citizens by the Malian state, the barefoots only muster several thousands of adherents in the entire country.

In Bougouni barefoots are composed of a few families settled at the vicinity of Heremakono district. They built their own mosque; the only one not registered in AMUPI's record of mosques. The barefoots are not part of the AMUPI because of their religious views, which are mainly rooted in their refusal of modernity of present time; they are deemed 'extremist'.<sup>122</sup> Wherever they go, barefoots attract public scrutiny. Their specific outfits are easily recognisable. Barefoots walking on the streets of Bougouni often provoke mocking remarks from passers-by. Most Muslims consider them as crazy people and Muslim extremists. Their small number of followers however causes more laughter than suspicion among Muslims there.

Bougouni also hosts the so-called 'Wahhabis'<sup>123</sup> who name themselves 'Sunnis'; but following colonial terminology they have been labelled 'Wahhabis' by those who are not affiliated to their doctrines. Although they cover a heterogeneous group of Muslims, they all refer to reformist movements of Arabic influences for two main reasons. Many members of their religious elite have studied Islam in Middle-East; they vehemently criticise the superimposition of local social structure on religious offices, the *maraboutage* practices and the cult of saints adopted by most local Muslims.<sup>124</sup>

The so-called 'Wahhabis' were established first in Bamako, Bouaké and Sikasso.<sup>125</sup> The town of Bougouni located half way between Bamako and Sikasso hosts an important minority of Wahhabis who gather in four mosques (one Friday mosque) and two *médersas* of reformist allegiance (out of the 33 mosques and 7 *médersas* of the town of Bougouni). The expansion of reformist movements has stagnated since the 1990s; nonetheless their presence is very visible due to their display of outwards signs of religious affiliation.

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.sectes-infos.net/repression-39.htm>; <http://www.liberation.fr/monde/01012306503-l-islam-au-mali-loin-d-aqmi>; <http://www.cmm.asso.fr/spip.php?article828> (retrieved the 20.07.2011).

<sup>122</sup> Although AMUPI is not a state association anymore, it is still considered as such. Except for the barefoots, all the main Malian Muslims tendencies are represented in the AMUPI. On AMUPI, see introduction.

<sup>123</sup> On detailed definition of Wahhabis in Mali, see Soares (2005a, 180-209) and Brenner (2001).

<sup>124</sup> 'Reformists wrote and spoke forcefully about the need to combat *bid'a* (Ar. Innovation), which means unlawful innovation in Islam' (Soares 2005a, 183).

<sup>125</sup> On Wahhabis in Bamako, see Amselle (1985); on Wahhabis traders in Sikasso, see Warms (1992).

They are noticeable by what people call their 'Arabic dress code'. Women are mostly confined at home, but when they go outside they wear integral black veils over ordinary cloths. Men wear white robes and trousers. Their pants are shorter than ordinary ones. They are cut in the calf region so as to avoid picking up dirt from the soil that can invalidate the prayer. Men let their beards grow. Wahhabis also pray with arms crossed by contrast with arms hanging by sides (adopted by all other local Muslims) and have promoted modern and rational Islamic education (*médersa*) in Mali by contrast to the traditional Islamic education (*dugumakalan*)<sup>126</sup>, or Western-style public school (see Brenner 2001).<sup>127</sup>

Wahhabis have been received with mixed feelings in Mali. Most Muslims I met share the opinion of Sidy the builder who said 'Wahhabis are knowledgeable about Islam, but they exaggerate'. One of his *promotionnaires* (schoolmates) became a Wahhabi. Despite their religious divergences, they stayed friends over the years. Sidy respects his friend's knowledge of the Islamic sacred texts, but he thinks his friend sometimes goes too far when he struggles to find an Islamic explanation for everything and to restrict his conduct to religious guidelines only.

'The Wahhabis are walking on a thin red line. They think life is within religion. For me however it is the opposite. Religion is within life. It is tough for them. They sometimes drop it'.

Sidy's comment - walking on the thin red line - depicts the wahhabi path as a tightrope walk-like because its religious rigour makes life complicated.<sup>128</sup> Many educated Muslims who read Islamic sacred texts by themselves also criticise the Wahhabis for their '*islam littéraliste*'<sup>129</sup> (Holder 2009a, 241) that consistently seeks to encapsulate Muslim life into a set of norms. As the world-as-it-is (the real) cannot be fully grasped by textual knowledge, so this kind of intellectual process is often blamed for its speculative tendency. For Bakary the engineer, when the nature of Islamic authority is enclosed in intellectual interpretation and textual knowledge, one risks reducing the conception of proper Muslim life to 'all that is not written is condemned' to the detriment of 'all that is not condemned is allowed'. Put differently, Bakary associated the Islamic sacred texts as a finger which points at God: the Qur'an and Hadiths indicate the direction of the religious path. However, the Wahhabis study the finger instead of

<sup>126</sup> On the traditional Islamic education, see chapter 1.

<sup>127</sup> Many Muslims who are not affiliated with reformist movements send their children to *médersa* as well. However, *médersa* do not differ from public schools in term of school dropout and absenteeism. Many students leave school after only a couple of years. Most former *médersa* students therefore know rudimentary Arab.

<sup>128</sup> In similar vein, people adopting Salafi piety in Egypt face 'practical problem' and may suffer from 'backlash' due to the difficulties of living according to Salafi piety in contemporary Egypt (Schielke 2009b, 176–177).

<sup>129</sup> Literal Islam.

the direction it reveals because their textual approach to Islam keeps them from seeing the wider world into which religious life is inserted.

Many Muslims also blame Wahhabis for undermining the local tradition of 'social ethics' (*hadamadenya*) because they tend to socialise among themselves only and do not attend the life-cycle rituals of other Muslims. In similar vein Wahhabis are depicted as those who weaken social harmony and community life because they do things differently: their public codes, their way of praying, and the praying times in their mosques differ from the rest of Muslims in Mali. Wahhabis are also the only Muslims in Mali who do not celebrate the national celebration of the Maouloud (the birth of the Prophet) (Holder 2009a). Other Muslims, referring to their 'Arabic dress code', criticise Wahhabis for confounding Islam with Arabic culture. These Muslims argue the long tradition of Islam in Mali certify local Islam as valid as Islamic tendencies coming from the Arabic world.

The third category is 'Sufi'; it covers the 'phenomenon of new Sufis' found in Bougouni (see Soares 2007). These recent movements are articulated around 'new Muslim public figures' that have emerged thanks to recent liberalisation, freedom of association and new media of communication in the 1990s (Ibid, 80). Among these movements, one is present in Bougouni; the Sufi branch of Cheick Soufi Bilal. This new Sufi movement has attracted public attention because of the media coverage of its spiritual leader. Bilal is a prolific writer and famous preacher with a growing saintly reputation in Mali. Overall, his charisma and '*bricolage*' of various Sufi orders (Ibid, 85), his youthful appearance and dreadlocks indexing 'youth urban culture' (Ibid, 83) have supported his reputation of open-mindedness among ordinary Muslims of the younger generation in Bougouni. The followers of Cheick Soufi Bilal opened a *zawiya* in Dialanikoro district in the late 1990s. They organise regular public preaching (*wajuli*) in the evening that always draws a crowd.<sup>130</sup> Many young Muslims I met appreciate the new Sufis because of their tolerance and their acceptance of dance and music within their conception of a proper Muslim life. By contrast, elders are more suspicious towards such movements which they depict as rebel and lacking of good manners.

The fourth category is 'Ansar'; the diminutive for members of the *Ansar Dine*<sup>131</sup> Islamic association. Founded in 1983 in Bamako by Cherif Ousmane Madani Haïdara's, *Ansar Dine* in less than 30 years has become the most powerful Muslim association in present-day Mali.<sup>132</sup> The success of this association is mostly due to the oratorical skills and outspokenness of their '*guide spirituel*' Ousmane Cherif Haïdara who defied Moussa Traoré's dictatorial regime and

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<sup>130</sup> On detailed analysis of Cheick Soufi Bilal, see Soares (2007, 80-86).

<sup>131</sup> *Ansar Dine* is a Arabo-bamanan expression which means 'the guardians/helpers of religion [Islam]'; Holder translates it into '*les Partisans de la Religion*' (the Followers of Religion) (2009a, 277).

<sup>132</sup> On *Ansar Dine* and Cherif Ousmane Madani Haïdara, see Schulz (2003; 2006a; 2006b; 2007) and Soares (2005a).

harshly criticised reformist movements in Mali. Haïdara's popularity is also due to his promotion of local 'social ethics' (*hadamadenya*) in the shaping of Muslim faith such as his emphasis on *jogo numan* (correct attitude) and *hɔrɔnya* (nobleness) in parallel with traditional Islamic precepts. Membership of this association is growing, and members are very active in Bougouni where they organise weekly public preaching. These events often end with public swearing of allegiance of new members to *Ansar Dine* and his spiritual guide.<sup>133</sup> For Ansar, the profession of the Islamic creed (*Shahada*)<sup>134</sup> does not completely certify adherence to Muslim faith; someone adheres fully to Islam only through making the six Islamic promises (Ar. *baya*)<sup>135</sup> during the public swearing of allegiance.

Members of *Ansar Dine* do not aim to pray in a specific mosque. Nevertheless they recently built a local head office where they organise various Islamic events. Men do not wear recognisable symbols of allegiance, but women known as 'Ansar *musow*' wear partial veils that cover their hair. Their practice of partial veiling makes them easily recognisable within a crowd because most Muslim women (except wahhabi women) do not cover their hair in Mali.

Ansars also provokes criticism from ordinary Muslims and especially from Muslim scholars and elders. Most elders dislike the straightforward rhetoric of Haïdara and denounce him as a vulgar man. One of Haïdara's interventions over sexuality has been the subject of many controversies among Muslims in Bougouni. As response to someone's question about sex acts tolerated by Islam, Haïdara simply stated that how to make love is up to the married couple. Then he specified that a married man can even 'put his wife on top' if he desires to do so. What he added shocked many Muslims who thought such a statement is unworthy of a religious leader. Many Muslims criticise those who join the *Ansar Dine* association as Muslims who just want to be trendy; their adherence is based more on fashion than on Islamic faith. Many also regret the fact that success has softened Haïdara's positions to the point of reneging on his earlier criticism of ostentatious religious leaders and corrupted elites. Muslims who have followed his trajectory since 1980s criticise Haïdara for becoming a kind of Muslim entrepreneur, who now possesses big, luxury cars (Hummers and 4x4s) and runs a successful travel company specialised in the organisation of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. They point to the '*embourgeoisment*' of Haïdara who even joined the HCIM<sup>136</sup> in 2006 (see Holder 2009a, 279), an Islamic association created by the government in early 2000s so as to balance the power of the AMUPI in the national level.<sup>137</sup> This structure, gathering members of the Muslim

<sup>133</sup> On public swearing of allegiance, see <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200908060904.html> (retrieved the 03.02.2012).

<sup>134</sup> The Muslim declaration of belief in the oneness of God and acceptance of Muhammad as his Prophet.

<sup>135</sup> I do not associate anything to God, I do not steal, I do not commit adultery, I do not kill my children, I do not slander, I do not disobey to the Prophet' (Qur'an LX,12).

<sup>136</sup> *Haut Conseil Islamique du Mali*.

<sup>137</sup> On HCIM, see Holder (2009a, 274–275), Schulz (2012, 177–178), and Soares (2005b, 83).

establishment, is conceived as the official interface between the Malian state and the Muslim community concerning religious affairs in the country.

The popularity of Haïdara among Muslims, the circulation of his preaching on local radio, and via DVDs shown in *grins* and courtyards, the presence of his picture on trucks, cars and shops make him an unavoidable religious figure in Bougouni and the sole 'media star' of the Islamic sphere of contemporary Mali (see Soares 2007). Above all, I argue, the success of Haïdara stems from his criticism of Arabic Islam and his focus on social ethics that remind Muslims of the twofold nature of piety. The success of Haïdara in present-day Mali deserves further examination; the reasons Haïdara's views are sympathetically received by many ordinary Muslims (and especially the youth) will be explored in chapter 6.

### ***The ordinary Muslim***

'There are many paths within Islam; the Ansar, Sufi, Wahhabi, Barefoots and those who walk on Muhammad's path. I am among those who follow Muhammad only. We do not have a chief except God himself'. (Boubacar, 38 years old, seller of *yuguyuguw* in Bougouni)

The fifth category '*silame*' (Muslim) accounts for the vast majority of Muslims found in Bougouni. I intentionally translate *silame* as "ordinary Muslim". The category of ordinary Muslims was first developed by Peletz in his study of Islamic resurgence in the Malay Peninsula (1997). He wanted to understand how the vast majority of Malays perceive discourses of Malay Muslim reformers so as to 'examine the production and consumption of contrasting discourses on Islam and Malay cultural identity in contemporary Malaysia' (Ibid, 232). Although its heterogeneity is problematic, Peletz argued that 'ordinary Muslims' is employed in order to focus on 'contrast' with 'Muslim resurgents' rather than on religious orientations per se (Ibid, 233). In similar work, Mckenna studied everyday political relations between Muslim rulers and rebels, and ordinary Muslims in the context of Muslim national struggle in the Cotabato region of the southern Philippines (1998). In his work, Mckenna defined ordinary Muslims as lower class Muslims (peasants, low-skilled wage workers) who were not members of political elite and who did not possess strong ethnoreligious consciousness (Ibid, 292n3). Inspired by both authors, I would like to adapt the category of ordinary Muslims for my study of everyday Islam in Bougouni and southwest Mali.



Mainstream Islam in Bougouni is rooted in broader traditional African Islam, itself originating from Sufi orders (mostly Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya) which dominated Islam during the colonial period there. However locals do not speak of Sufi affiliation because most of them have never been related to any Sufi leaders (*muqaddam*). They just received their religious education from Muslims who were somehow influenced by dominant Sufi orders of the Islamic sphere of their epoch. Only a few elders I met in the field remembered the Sufi origins of their religious background. Otherwise, the overwhelming majority of Muslims just say 'I am Muslim' (*ne yé silame yé*).

Following Boubacar's statement, I start to define ordinary Muslims as Muslims who perceive themselves neither as members of a religious elite, nor as members of specific religious movements. While ordinary Muslims might sympathise with some aspects of Islamic currents introduced in the previous section, nonetheless, they are affiliated to none of them. In similar vein, Osella and Osella mention the existence of 'just Muslims' in Kerala; although these Muslims declare themselves in private not to be aligned with particular groups, they take a clearer religious affiliation in public due to an over-determination of identity by political events (2008b). Such a situation of political pressure over the choice of a specific Muslim identity does not exist in Mali. How then do ordinary Muslims position themselves within the religious pluralisation of contemporary Mali?

I first explore the category of ordinary Muslim in relation to contemporary changes in religious authority and Islamic knowledge in Mali.

As demonstrated in recent anthropological works about Islam in Mali (Schulz 2006a; 2007), Muslims do not need to rely exclusively on religious leaders for religious authority. According to Schulz (2007, 146), the diffusion of religious knowledge on broadcast media has contributed 'to a process of objectification in the course of which "religion" becomes the object of individual scrutiny and identity construction'. To illustrate, one day I entered a clothing store in the market of Bougouni. The merchant welcomed me and asked what I was looking for. After the usual commercial exchange we opened up the conversation. He wanted to know what I was doing in Bougouni. Knowing that the figure of the anthropologist would not make any sense to my interlocutor, I simply replied with what Muslim friends used to say to express the fact of someone being interested in Islam: 'I am curious about Islam' (*Ne be jɛnini silameya kan*). He then smiled and replied 'it is easy!' (*a ka jɔgon!*). After having explained to me a few things about Islam, he told me: 'I've got books [on Islam]'. He put his hand behind a shelf, pulled a small book out of the dust and lent it to me. This sort of notebook had no named author; it was illustrated with drawings and *Bamanan* writings that

explained how to make ablution, how to pray and basic moral guidelines. At its back a couple of sentences attracted my attention,

‘Put this small book in your pocket. Take it with you when you go working to the fields. Then study it very much. Learn it entirely by heart’.<sup>138</sup>

This couple of instructions indicated three points: Islam is accessible to all; one should learn about Islam by oneself; one can study Islam whenever and wherever one wants. They correspond to what I observed in Bougouni. Ordinary Muslims belong to what Lambek calls ‘people from the path’ because ‘everyone strives also, to one degree or another, to become and act as a well-informed [Muslim]’.<sup>139</sup> The verb ‘*Ka jɛpini fɛn kan*’ means ‘to search for the cause of something’ in the above anecdote (see Bailleul 1996). My Muslim friends just translated ‘*nɛ bɛ jɛpini silamɛya kan*’ into ‘*J’ai la curiosité de l’Islam*’ (I am curious about Islam).<sup>140</sup> They too are curious about Islam, but they do not investigate Islam in the same way than members of religious elite do because Islam is not their main activity. By contrast an Islamic student would rather say ‘I study Islam’ (*nɛ bɛ silamɛya kalan*).<sup>141</sup> My friends’ nuanced translation is meaningful because it signifies that ordinary Muslims want to learn about Islam, but they are invested in other interests and activities of a mundane and earthly nature as well; being a good Muslim is one domain among others which constitute a successful life in Bougouni.<sup>142</sup> It is worth noting that the term *jɛpini* is composed of two words: *jɛ* (eye) and *jini* (search); both together express the fact of being curious. The one who is curious tends to gaze at what surrounds him; at some point he will pay attention to Islam because religiosity is part of the society he belongs to. Then he will learn a bit about Islam because it informs local social life and moral life. Moving forward in life might involve also religious ambitions. Here Islam is not an end in itself but is inserted in broader mundane projects, such as getting married, having children, possessing motorbikes and a car, and building a cement house among other factors defining what constitute a successful life in Bougouni.

Ordinary Muslims are the outcome of religious pluralisation; they are aware of an international Islamic world and, at the same time, of an ongoing fragmentation of the

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<sup>138</sup> *Gafenin in bila i jufa kɔnɔ, i ka taɔa n’a ye foro la. A kalan kosebɛ. A bɛɛ durusi.*

<sup>139</sup> I replaced ‘citizen’ by ‘Muslim’.

<sup>140</sup> Marsden and Retsikas elaborate the category of ‘people of Muslim background’ (forthcoming). How do ordinary Muslims differ from people of Muslim background? The latter category includes the religious elite and members of specific religious groups; it emphasises Islam as a cultural trait. The former focuses more on Islam as religious experience among non elite and unaffiliated Muslims. To be curious about religion is an important dimension of Islam I explore among the ordinary Muslims of Bougouni, whereas it is not necessarily the case for all people of religious background. In this study, the category of ordinary Muslims comes close to what Schulz coined as ‘observant Muslims’ who are both not-affiliated Muslims and practising Muslim (xiv; 6).

<sup>141</sup> *Ka fɛn kalan* (to study something).

<sup>142</sup> On further explanations of successful life in Bougouni, see chapter 5.

contemporary Islamic sphere. The opening up of the world also reveals its divisions. It points to rivalries and contradictions between Islamic currents that show the limits of control of religious leaders over the realm of religiosity. The opinion of Madou, the local DJ, exemplifies well the weakening of religious authority: 'One Muslim scholar says turn left, and another one says turn right. At the end we do not know where to go!' In similar vein, Oumar, the teacher, and her daughter complain about this religious fragmentation that they notice on the religious programme called *Les Oulémas* that is broadcast every Friday on ORTM<sup>143</sup> national TV channel: 'We do not like this programme because it is only a series of chunks of preaching. Each of them is incomplete. Each Muslim scholar would like to say something. Finally they say nothing. They just want to appear on TV!'

Before such a complex, fragmented and somewhat contradictory Islamic sphere, I argue, most Muslims prefer not to be affiliated to any clear-cut Muslim movements. Ordinary Muslims do not follow specific religious leader(s) or specific body of doctrines. They just build their religiosity by picking what they find relevant for their life in whatever Muslim tendencies are at their disposal in the religious market of post-1991 Mali which aroused from the reinforced of the *laïcité* of the Malian state and the liberal policies on religious expression in Mali.<sup>144</sup>

For instance, one of my Muslim friends Ali is a sympathizer of Haidara because he likes his teaching on correct attitude. He regularly attends public preaching organised by the *Ansar Dine* section of Bougouni. He also listens to Haïdara's preaching in local radio programmes when he is at work. However he is not an Ansar because he does not feel the need to be affiliated. For him, living a proper Muslim life and being a member of an Islamic movement are two different things. For him, religiosity as an object of individual scrutiny does not necessarily involve firm affiliation; his religious experience is inserted into mundane settings that involve broader agendas. His Muslim life is primarily conceived through the achievement of success in life. Ali also attends public sermons organised by followers of Cheick Bilal in Bougouni. Although he does not support wahhabi doctrines, he nevertheless agrees with wahhabi critics on the local custom of ostentatious marriages that burdens families with debts. He is simply curious about Islam because, among other goals, he wants to live a proper Muslim life. He identifies himself as '*silame daron*' (Muslim only).

Although ordinary Muslims do not follow a specific body of doctrines, they relate their Muslim identity to a sort of presumed universal Islam I develop in the next section.

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<sup>143</sup> Office de la Radiodiffusion Télévision du Mali.

<sup>144</sup> On further implications of the notion of religious market in anthropology, see Pelkmans (2006, 30–32).

### ***The formation of a generic Islam***

The events of 1991 promoted democratic process and civil liberties that have increased the visibility of Muslim activism in Mali. According to Holder, contemporary Mali is characterised by the formation of an '*espace publique religieux*' (public religious sphere) within which Islamic currents are advocating the public practice of piety, and politicians are seeking to seduce a Muslim electorate (2009a). By contrast to a logic of rupture with its claim of an Islamic state, the contemporary linkages between Islam and politics in Mali follow a '*logique d'accommodement*' (logic of accommodation) (2009b). In this context I would like to focus precisely on how ordinary Muslims respond to the '*moralisation*' of the public sphere supported by Muslim scholars, Islamic movements and their followers.

Like Soares (2004, 223), my approach to the public sphere in Mali is not related to the Habermasian notion of 'public opinion'; I instead point to the notion of Islamic consensus (*ijma*) and its formation in post 1991 Mali as the common ground upon which the Muslim community discuss about piety. I aim to show how and why a fragmented religious sphere in Mali, with its preferred discourses of 'truth and ignorance', have reduced the Islamic consensus to professions of public Islam and avowals of piety in the practice of Islamic precepts.

The history of Islamic debate in Mali is related to what Brenner terms 'doctrinal politics' (2001). Muslim scholars have mostly enunciated Islamic disputes around discourses of 'truth and ignorance', as following he puts it,

'Consequently, doctrinal political debate inevitably includes claims and counter-claims about what is "true", and about which scholars are truly knowledgeable and possess a full command of Islamic texts, and which are 'ignorant' (2001,135).

For Brenner, past and present doctrinal politics between Muslim scholars have been characterised by the following equation: - Whoever knows tells the truth; the others are ignorant - In this way 'the expansion of each movement was accompanied by one, or several, doctrinal initiatives which simultaneously challenged a pre-existing doctrinal position and sought to demonstrate the superior Islamic knowledge of the leader in question' (Ibid, 137). Putting the same point differently, Muslim scholars have always argued about the purity/impurity of Muslim practices.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> For Brenner, the outcome of such debate 'depends ultimately on the intellectual capacity of its proponents to propagate and defend it, that is, upon their knowledge and control of the basic sources [the Qur'an and the Hadith] (Ibid, 135). Here I disagree

Then what can we say about the reception of such discourses among ordinary Muslims within the ongoing religious fragmentation of the Islamic sphere in Mali? How is Muslim identity assessed when various conceptions of proper Muslim life coexist and compete with each other? How do ordinary Muslims apprehend their common religious background and make sense of a broader Muslim community? I argue, Muslims still base their unity on Islamic consensus, however a 'generic' one that is reduced to the assumed universals of Islam (Eickelmann 1989).

Eickelmann defined the notion of 'generic Islam' as the outcome of modern mass education and religious policy of the Oman state whose aim was to develop Islamic studies as 'scrupulously non-sectarian subject' (1989). In this context, state authorities promoted generic Islam as the means to foster a shared Islamic curriculum and to avoid sectarian divisions between Ibadis, Sunnis and Shi'ahs. In Mali, generic Islam is also a sort of shared Islamic curriculum, but its development is not similar to the one found in Oman because it is not the result of a peculiar religious policy.

Given that Mali has an overwhelming Muslim majority, Malian Muslims tend to say 'Mali is a Muslim country'. The fact that they say Mali is a *laïc* and, at the same time, a Muslim country is not contradictory. Their statement does not express the wish for an Islamic state; it rather stresses the fact that Mali is part of the Muslim world commonly called 'the global Islamic community' (*umma*). As such Islam is an important cultural referent for Mali. In parallel, Islam as cultural system has been imagined (Anderson 1983) in modern times as one of the 'world religions'<sup>146</sup> of our contemporary epoch (Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair 2009). Both these ideas of - *umma* and world religion - reinforce the perception of Islam as an authentic, coherent and encompassing system to ordinary Muslims. However, following the arguments of Cook, Laidlaw and Mair, this system does not exist out there, as if it had an existence separated from Muslims; 'the widespread assumption by adherents of self-consciously world religions that there *must be* a coherent whole of which they are part is itself a religious commitment' (Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair 2009, 54). This system therefore needs to be continuously produced and explained by Muslims so as to exist and to endure. Thus, I argue, the practice of generic Islam systematises Islam as the common cultural background of a religious nature for ordinary Muslims in the heterogeneous and contested field of Islamic currents in Mali. This situation is foremost the progressive outcome of the relationship

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with Brenner. Knowing and persuading are two different arts. Although both involve intellectual capacity, they do not reduce to it. Reformist movements in Mali developed within a 'rationalistic episteme' (see Brenner 2001, 7-8) and a literal Islam which constituted their main sources of religious authority (on similar reflexions about reformist movements in Egypt, see Schielke (2006)). However, reformist movements convinced only a minority of Muslims in Mali. Most Muslims reflect upon Islam not only in term of intellectual capacity in Mali. Local conceptions of proper Muslim life are also related to status, ethics and belongings of subjective origins.

<sup>146</sup> On an analysis of the category of 'world religion' as historical product, see Masuzawa (2005).

between the sense of a global Islamic community and the process of the religious fragmentation of the Islamic sphere. Following Bowen's line of inquiry between "universal" and "local" Islamic traits (1998), I now ask how generic Islam as putatively element of universal Islam has been made and taken up in the specific cultural area of Mali?

Muslims in Mali have promoted the standardisation of religious practice since the colonial period. At that time Islam was the sole idiom that could bring together people of different social status and origins. In parallel the emergence of a public sphere 'has also created pressures for Islamic practices to be more uniform' so as to gather Muslims into the same community (Soares 2005a, 240).<sup>147</sup> Such processes accelerated during the postcolonial period with the implications of small media and Muslim associations that have helped 'to foster a supralocal sense of shared Muslim identity in Mali' (Soares 2005a, 238).<sup>148</sup> In addition, Muslim identity has been associated with the exhibition of outwards signs of Islam (e.g. regular daily prayers and fasting); the correct way of being Muslim has tended to be mostly assessed with respect to its public signs (see Soares 2004). Paradoxically, I argue, this process of standardisation of religious practice has also been accelerated by the recent religious fragmentation of the Islamic sphere. What unites Muslims when the Islamic sphere becomes divided into multiple minority Islamic currents? My response is that the imagined community of Muslims has helped to assemble ordinary Muslims around a sort of generic Islam. This generic Islam can be interpreted as the lowest common denominator tolerated by most Muslim scholars and their followers.

In order to refer to what unites Muslims, most of my Muslim friends simply pronounced the first pillar of Islam that is the Islamic creed (*Shahada*): the Muslim declaration of belief in the oneness of God and acceptance of Muhammad as his Prophet. Others also uttered the sura *Al-Fatiha*<sup>149</sup> they learnt by heart<sup>150</sup> and which is intoned in each prayer and during every life-ritual ceremony in Mali. They also said that you should pray and fast when asked. Then some added that wealthy Muslims have to help the poor, and to go to the Mecca. Most Muslims unite around the five Islamic pillars which are the Islamic creed, the regular

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<sup>147</sup> On the public sphere in Mali, see Soares (2005a, 222-238).

<sup>148</sup> I disagree with Soares when he wrote: 'One could even go so far as to say that Islam has come to saturate the sphere of public discourse in postcolonial Mali' (2005a, 222). Islam is an important public discourse in Bougouni, but not the only one. Furthermore, Christian discourses are visible in contemporary secular Mali through radio and TV programmes (such as Saturday night Catholic and Protestant programmes on ORTM). I also attended public preaching of various evangelic priests in Bougouni. For instance, the *Mission d'Evangelisation et d'Implantation des Eglise MEIE-MIN* organised 5 evenings of evangelisation, prayer and blessing from 24 to 28 February 2009 in the Sakoro Mery Diakité soccer stadium. These religious events were guided by an American evangelist and a Malian minister. Many local Muslims attended them from curiosity and for entertainment. Others wanted to receive blessings from Christian leaders.

<sup>149</sup> The sura *Al-Fatiha* is the first chapter of the Qur'an. Its seven verses are a prayer for God's guidance and stress the lordship and mercy of God.

<sup>150</sup> Most Malian Muslims still learnt *Al-Fatiha* by heart without knowing its meaning. In Bougouni, Muslim families commonly send their teenagers to a family of a Muslim scholar for their religious education. They stay there 1-3 months (during school break) the time to learn how to take ablution, how to pray and basic moral guidance. Some children receive their religious education with an elder of their own family.

daily prayer, the ritual fasting, the alms-giving and the pilgrimage of the Hajj. The statement below that I collected in Bougouni during an informal chat I had with a couple of elders in the courtyard of a small mosque, illustrates the state of the Islamic consensus found in town.

‘Muslims throughout Mali agree on the five Islamic pillars.

The rest is only disagreement (Imam, Bougouni)’.

We can say that *ijma* has been reduced to profession of the five Muslim pillars, avowals of piety about the practice of Islamic precepts, abstention from consumption of alcohol, the Friday communal prayers in a mosque, and the Hajj pilgrimage; they constitute the main markers of Islamic faith in Mali. For many Muslims, the unity of Islam somehow stops here. This sounds rather simplistic, but here Muslims take *ijma* as a straightforward statement that does not need the backing of any religious authority to be verified. Of course Muslims can achieve consensus over other points, but such consensus is never immediate; it stems from debate the outcome of which is partial, changing and situational.

In response to the increasing public expression of piety observed among the followers of the many Islamic movements found in post 1991 Mali, ordinary Muslims of Bougouni (especially members of the emerging urban middle class and local elite, family heads and elders)<sup>151</sup> have adopted the display of common outwards signs of piety such as the white robe of Arabic style, rounded small white cap called ‘*silame fugulan*’ (Muslim hat) and white Moroccan-style slippers among other items and clothes in the Muslim dress code, or what I call “the Muslim look”. As women are traditionally linked to the household (cooking, household chores and child rearing), the female outwards signs of piety are less significant because they are not necessarily put on public display. However, in her book called *Muslims and new media in West Africa: pathways to God* (Ibid.), Schulz focuses on the female face of the post-1991 Islamic renewal in the urban localities of San and Bamako; through the decision of “taking the veil” as an act of public self-expression, she illustrates how the public practice of piety has become an important element of religious identity among female participants in the Islamic renewal movements. Nonetheless, except during prayer, the overwhelming majority of ordinary Muslim women in Bougouni do not wear the veil.

The moralisation of the public sphere, supported by Islamic movements and their followers, gained new momentum following the introduction of new civil liberties in 1991. What I would like to add is that the practice of a generic Islam and the display of outwards

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<sup>151</sup> On the new Muslim elite with similar public and ‘deprivatized Islam’ in Mali, see Soares (2005b). However, when Soares refers to new religious intellectuals in Islamic studies, I refer to broader urban elites (civil servants, merchants, teachers, doctors, NGO workers (...)).

signs of piety in public life in Bougouni, are both encouraged and made possible by the longstanding cultivation of ostentatious identities found in Mali. This specifically public Islam was enabled by the visual and open character of street life found in urban Mali.

### ***Public Islam and the visual and open character of street life***

In the preface to an edited book called *Public Islam and the common good*, Eickelman and Salvatore broadly state that ““Public Islam” refers to the highly diverse invocations of Islam as ideas and practices that religious scholars, self-ascribed religious authorities, secular intellectuals, Sufi orders, mothers, students, workers, engineers, and many others make to civic debate and public life’ (2004, xii). Although fitting their wider theoretical perspective, the notion of public Islam I put forward here does not fully correspond to any of those explored in the chapters of their edited book.<sup>152</sup> Rather than a discursive, mass-mediated and transnational public Islam shaping the contemporary public sphere, as in most Muslim countries, the public Islam I conceive of here originates from the open character of street life found in urban Mali.

Daily life is about street life in Mali. Street life mostly unfolds around its three main spaces of sociality which are the *carré*, the street and the *grin*.<sup>153</sup> As these spaces are highly visible and open, street life in urban Mali tends to bind the quotidian to a public performance. When ‘daily life is spent outdoors under the gaze of neighbours or passers-by’, one ‘lives in a quasi-constant state of surveillance, comparable, in some respects with Bentham’s panopticon’ (Archambault 2010, 123). Put differently, street life puts someone’s behaviour within sight throughout the day. In such open settings, Islam contributes to the moral evaluation of life through visual social control. In this way, the practice of generic Islam and the display of outwards signs of piety advertise the shaping of moral subjects in public. - To be - is also informed by - to appear/look - in Mali.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, observers are so attentive to what people do in public because this shapes their reputation. Indeed, social order in Mali is rooted in respect (*bonya*) which implies, above all, self-restraint in public, and in honour (*danbé*) which insists on correct behaviour, good manners and ostentatious display in public. The

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<sup>152</sup> Pinto (2004) and Soares (2004) refer to the public display of individual signs of piety, respectively in Syria and Mali; however, they do not specifically explore them in relation to social spaces.

<sup>153</sup> On a detailed description of these three spaces of sociality, see chapter 1.

<sup>154</sup> Here the notion of public space can be analysed as a ‘social arena’ in which the performances of actors are assessed through Islamic scripts (among other scripts) (Leclerc-Olive 2009).



visible open spaces of street life in Mali reinforce the fact that Islam, as medium of broader public identity, contributes to people's reputation. The relationships between public, power and Islam, have tended to transform Islamic identity as resource which is active in the broader politics of success in Bougouni and beyond.

During the day, prayer times<sup>155</sup> unfold as religious duties within *carrés*, around the shops and in the big market. Men and Women look for the colourful plastic pots (*selidaga*) they commonly use to perform their ritual ablution (*ka seliji ta*). Then, they take or borrow someone's prayer mat. If one is unavailable they might use plastic or jute bag instead. Then they pray on it wherever they are: within *carrés*, in workshops, in shops, in the waysides (...). Except for elders, Muslims do not necessarily go to the mosque. They just aim to pray wherever they happen to be with little concern for the noise and bustle impinging on their prayer space.

During my stay in Bougouni, the first Imam of a mosque in Torakabougou was criticised because he wore a 'veston' (blazer) over his white *boubou* during communal prayer. His detractors did not appreciate his blazer because they thought it was not a proper Islamic cloth. They added that the Imam should be an exemplary Muslim. In order to stay in office, the Imam had to remove his blazer.

Among public religious acts, Soares also noticed that 'communal Friday prayer has become perhaps the most public of all signs of piety in contemporary Mali' (2004, 220). As weekly collective event constituting the core of the holy day of Islam, the communal Friday prayer illustrates well the visual, social and ostentatious character of public piety found in Mali; indeed most Muslim men and old women go to the mosque for the Friday communal prayer. In 2010, among the 33 mosques of Bougouni five were considered as Friday mosques.<sup>156</sup> Every Friday just before 1 pm, the streets of Bougouni are packed with Muslims walking towards the Friday mosques for the communal prayer. At that time one can observe processions of finery and 'Friday' best. Men hold prayer mat and prayer beads and wear immaculate white cloths (big *boubou* or robe of Arabic style) and small rounded Muslim caps (*silame fugulan*) and turbans. Women wear loose-fitting traditional cloths (*boubou*) and partial veils decorated with colourful and golden embroideries. Although white is the colour of Islam due to its symbolising purity, other colours are tolerated except for red because it is linked to *bamanaya*.<sup>157</sup> A sharp-eyed observer can notice numerous polished shoes among the crowd as

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<sup>155</sup> Here I refer especially to the second prayer time (1-1.30pm) and the third prayer time (3.30-4pm)

<sup>156</sup> Usually, a mosque is selected as Friday mosque due to its size, its geographical position and its attendance. However, their choice is often subjected to political conflicts and difference of allegiances.

<sup>157</sup> Muslims can wear red colour as long as it is a minor colour such as a red scarf or a red design on a shirt, but I have never seen Muslims going to the mosque with red trousers and shirts because such cloths are too bound to *Bamanaya* practice; red cloths are known to be worn for *Bamanaya* rituals.

well. Locals say that those who come first to the Friday communal prayer and manage to find a place in the first row receive more '*baraji*' (divine award) than the others. The Friday mosques are so packed that the latecomers have to pray in rows outside the mosque. At that precise moment, the streets of the towns (especially in the vicinity of Friday mosques) are half-empty and silent. Inhabitants who are not Muslims, and the minority of Muslims who miss the Friday communal prayer, remain quiet while the Muslim community is praying together in the Friday mosques. When the prayer is over, the processions of finery start again and scatter as Muslims go back home, eating and relaxing with family and, later, visiting relatives and friends in town.

The visible and open character of street life refers also to public spaces in general, such as the markets, the coach stations, and public transportation. The next illustration of public Islam illustrates how the Islamic look of a stranger indicates his pious identity which, in turn, inspires respect. During a coach trip to Bamako I heard someone calling his unknown neighbour '*karamɔɔ*' (teacher in Islamic studies).<sup>158</sup> This person was a well-groomed young man with a sharp-cut beard; he wore a white robe of Arabic style, small rounded cap covered with golden embroidery, and white Moroccan slippers (*silame sabara*). He also had Islamic rings of luck (*garijɛɛ*)<sup>159</sup> on his fingers. He spent most of the time picking up his ostentatious mobile and conversing with his interlocutors in a calm voice. He also occasionally listened to a reading of the Qur'an in his white earphones.<sup>160</sup> His neighbour did not call him *karamɔɔ* by accident. Owing his Muslim look, he was respectfully called teacher in Islamic studies. Furthermore his clean appearance and his extravagant mobile were indices of wealth. One should respect an apparently pious and rich stranger.

The practice of public Islam in Mali indexes piety; a pious person is thought to attract *baraji* or God's favours. At the social level, a pious Muslim attracts the respect of the community; public expression of piety contributes to someone's honour in the eyes of Muslims. The public significance of values, respect and honour, are encapsulated in the following local French expression: '*Il/elle est quelqu'un de considéré(e)*' (literally, he/she is someone considered). In Mali this expression vehicles precisely two constitutive sets of meaning: 1. someone who is not just anyone because he/she is known among the community to be distinguishable from the masses; 2. someone regarded with regard and esteem (a person of standing). The kind of public Islam, which is supported by the visible and open character of street life in Bougouni, can be interpreted as the reformulation of an older social process of

<sup>158</sup> *karamɔɔ* means teacher in general. Someone knowledgeable in Islam is named *karamɔɔ*.

<sup>159</sup> Such a ring is easily recognised due to its small box-shaped form. I call it an Islamic ring because it is said a powerful name of God is enclosed in it. An esoteric ring brings luck and protection to its wearer.

<sup>160</sup> Public Islam has also been strengthened by new media and technologies. Here I am concerned with mobile phone practices. Many young people (and some elders as well) set Islamic ringtones on their mobile and listen to the melodic reading of the Qur'an in Arabic. Such reading sounds more like a chant. Muslims listen to them as pious entertainment that brings them *baraji*. Others download series of blessings into their mobile and listen to them for similar purposes.

Mande origin: the cultivation of ostentatious identities in public. This process has tended to transform the public expression of Muslim identity as a resource which is active in broader politics of success in Bougouni and beyond. A good Muslim '*est quelqu'un de considéré(e)*' within the Muslim society of Bougouni.

The public character of piety is not, however, devoid of criticism. The twofold nature of piety, both public and personal, that I explained through my opening anecdote of the madman, reminds ordinary Muslims of the problem of intentionality linked to the practice of public piety. Below, I introduce this issue through an ethnography of Islamic prayer in Bougouni.

### ***The Islamic prayer: a practice between faith and mundane status***

During my sojourn in Bougouni I became friendly with Yaya. The first time we met each other was during a public preaching (*wajuli*) organised by the Ansars of Bougouni.<sup>161</sup> At that time he was a newly married man who worked as a carpenter in a workshop in Dialanikoro. As a first son, local custom pressed him to stay with his father and his mother and to support them. Yaya and his wife then shared the same *carré* with his parents and younger brothers and sisters. From time to time, he invited me for lunch when he knew women were not cooking *to*<sup>162</sup> with *gan*<sup>163</sup> sauce because of my dislike for glutinous meal. One day, we ate my favourite Malian dish: rice with peanuts sauce (*tigadege.na*). Then we relaxed a bit while waiting for his younger brother who was preparing Malian tea. Yaya suddenly waved at me to look at his uncle who was visiting that day. He was praying just few meters away. A mobile phone was laid in front of him on the right corner of the prayer mat. More amusingly his uncle was holding a red hair comb in his hand while intoning sura. Yaya then smiled at me and whispered: 'You see, my uncle is always ready for business and seduction; and this even when he is praying!' Yaya's remark was more a joke than a critique. I saw many Muslims putting their mobile phone on the prayer mat during prayer (but not a hair comb!). Nevertheless, this joke indicates that the prayer is animated by numerous intentions, mindsets and focus; either pious ones or more mixed ones.

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<sup>161</sup> Yaya, as many young men, appreciates the rhetoric skills of Haïdara, but he is not an Ansar.

<sup>162</sup> Traditional semolina made of corn or millet.

<sup>163</sup> Lady-finger.

For Muslims, the Islamic prayer (*seli*)<sup>164</sup> is an important vehicle of the Islamic faith (*limaniya*).<sup>165</sup> It is the second pillar of Islam that is constituted by five daily prayers performed at precise moments during the day. The Islamic prayer concerns the relationship between the worshipper and God. My friend Boubacar who sells Chinese-made cloths in the big market of Bougouni used to say: 'Praying is about bringing God within you' ('*ka seli yé ka Ala jigin é kono yé*'). Without entering into the details of each of the five daily prayers,<sup>166</sup> I would like to stress the fact that Muslims say they communicate with God through prayer. This relationship is sacred; it should therefore be, neither distracted, nor interrupted.<sup>167</sup> Islamic prayer is a ritualistic performance that demands a pious disposition in order to be valid.<sup>168</sup> The true intention of the worshipper is only known by God, but small signs such as the above hair comb indicate that the worshipper can be distracted during his prayer.

Many times I entered shops and found someone praying behind the counter. I then went outside and waited until the shopkeeper had completed his prayer. Comings and goings, and street activities can affect someone's space of prayer. Such interferences are coped with differently. Some remain focused on their prayer whatever happens around them; others seem to lose focus; while their body and mouth may be in the correct Islamic posture for prayer, their eyes look instead at the movements around them which indicates that their mind is dissociated from the prayer. Once I went to a workshop because my bag had a big hole that needed to be fixed. There I came across someone praying on a mat between two doors. He looked at me when intoning sura. I stopped for a couple of seconds. He kept looking at me while intoning, and used a body language (with his eyes and hands) that I interpreted as 'what do you want?' I did not respond and waited until the end of his prayer. Others are affected by more subtle breaches of focus. Worries about daily life arise in the shape of thought during prayer. Such breaches of concentration during prayer evoke laughter and mockery among Muslims because one should remain focused during prayer. Ahmed the *bogolan* maker used to make fun of such easily distracted Muslims:

'Muslims even forget God during the prayer. For instance, during their prayer they think: "Heee, I did not close the door of the shop; shit! What if the robber comes?" What kind of Muslim is that?'

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<sup>164</sup> Ar. Salat.

<sup>165</sup> Ar. Al-iman (etymology).

<sup>166</sup> Each prayer contains from 2 to 4 *zakat*: a sort of round of prayer that includes bowings and intonations of sura.

<sup>167</sup> On another anthropological analysis over the problem over the cultivation of moral selfhood through Islamic prayer in Indonesia, see Simon (2009).

<sup>168</sup> Most Muslims in Mali consider Islam as pure, however, like Indonesian Muslims they differentiate 'the perfection of Islam' with 'the messiness of the human world' (Simon 2009, 258).

According to local discourses, Muslims face perturbations during prayer because God puts their faith to the test. Pious Muslims remain firm and unshakable in their prayer. Their link with God is direct and deep. Most of Muslims however struggle to stay on the Islamic path due to their somewhat unsure faith; they can then experience breaches of concentration during their prayer. A period of recurrent lack of concentration is sometimes understood as harbinger of misfortune as well. As such, breach of concentration during prayer illustrates fragile faith and reminds Muslim that the Islamic path is demanding. Therefore, people's alertness and attentiveness during prayer connote pious intentions; in this way, the Islamic prayer becomes a genuine pious expression. By contrast, breaches of concentration during prayer indicate the possibility of ambiguous, even insincere intentions and duplicity of the Islamic prayer. In this way, breaches of concentration and lapses during prayer can sometimes give rise to criticism that goes beyond the symptoms of a weak faith.

Public coaches in Mali stop at each prayer time. Although Islamic orthodoxy allows a traveller not to pray, most people get off the coach and pray; why then such religious zeal? As a Muslim friend commented 'we do not let people think we do not pray because this is ill-regarded'. Before only elders respected Islamic prayers; now young adults try to pray as well because regular daily prayer informs someone's reputation; people think that someone who prays also acts morally in life. Many times I heard people voice the opinion that Muslim families in Bougouni tend not to let their daughter any longer marry men who do not pray. Simply declaring one's Muslim identity does not necessarily make a person Muslim anymore. Such representations of Islam incline Muslims to perform Islamic prayer for the mundane status it brings them as well as to avoid being stigmatised as bad Muslims within their Muslim society.

This ethnography of Islamic prayer in Bougouni illustrates well the tension between the relational world (social) and the reflexive domain (personal intention). The fulfilment of religious duty in Mali can be motivated by faith, but also by other mundane schemes.

Islam is nowadays an important moral authority that shapes public life in Mali. However, when public Islam is practised for the social consideration it brings to the Muslim and to avoid being stigmatised as a bad Muslim within the Muslim society, it risks undermining the practice of public norms of piety by making them a mere mundane ritual emptied of genuine faith. Similarly to Minangkabau people of Indonesia, many Muslims of Bougouni 'complained that so much of public religious life was hypocritical, a mere show' (Simon 2009,

270). Such Muslims are accused of not praying with the correct disposition.<sup>169</sup> Below, I explore the issue of hypocrisy related to public Islam in Mali.

### ***'Zigzag' Muslims***

Many Muslims question the professions of public Islam and avowals of piety as the practice of Islamic precepts because they do not index pious intentions only. The effect of the spread of generic Islam and outward religious signs in Mali has been to put the sincerity of public piety among ordinary Muslims in question, and to remind them of the twofold nature of piety, both public and personal, explained in the introduction of this chapter. Here I argue that when moral failings are involved ordinary Muslims respond to the discourses of 'truth and ignorance' of Muslim scholars and the moralisation of the public sphere supported by their followers through the parallel discourses of 'sincerity-hypocrisy' I illustrated in the above comments on Islamic prayer. Apart from Muslim scholars themselves, such discourses concern particularly those who do not follow the twofold nature of piety in their practice of public Islam.

The nature of hypocrisy can be manifold because, as deception, it can appear in many different situations. As Judith Shklar explains, hypocrisy whether originating from a naive or a wicked mind, is a socially learned behaviour which aims at profit through the art of pretence: the fact of 'assuming a false appearance' with 'dissimulation of real character or inclination' as means to an end (1979, 3). An accusation of hypocrisy can uncover serious matters: the detection of moral insecurity and worst of all the unmasking of evil schemes. In Bougouni, a Muslim who did not pray was seen as a bad Muslim. However, the sincere attitude imputed to his mind towards Islam protected him from odious accusations. His faith was just deemed weak. People were more fearful of 'zigzag' Muslims because the fact of praying without faith betrayed the presence of a malicious mind.

During my fieldwork, discourses of 'sincerity-hypocrisy' were particularly directed against Muslims of upper status within the community (such as big traders, heads of family, civil servants, politicians) and followers of Islamic movements who emphasised outwards signs of piety but revealed a lack of sincerity in their practice through moral failings they displayed in

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<sup>169</sup> For instance, on the 15 July 1995, the Muslim Indonesian politician leader, Haji Harmoko, was accused of having mispronounced the opening verse in the Qur'an, *al-Fatihah*, at the end of a *dalang* (shadow puppet performance). His 'slip of the tongue' was the subject of many debates among Indonesian Muslims. Even after his official apology, some of them interpreted his gaffe as a proof of ignorance, as if he was, in his heart, more *dalang*-like than Muslim (Bowen 2000).

life. Such Muslims were accused of just wanting to look Muslim for the status Muslim identity gave them within the community. Their moral failings indicated that their practice of Islam was bound to selfish and political aims rather than a genuine faith. They pretended to be good Muslims in public, but they acted in an un-Islamic manner when they were out of sight. They did not walk straight on the Islamic path. Sekou the guard of hotel used to say:

‘Those married men who bear Muslim names, pray in public and says ‘God is The greatest’<sup>170</sup>, but bring prostitutes to the hotel during the night are not Muslims; they are zigzag Muslims’.

During the evening I used to stop at the coach station where I sat and chatted for a while with people I met in one of the numerous restaurants and shops of this busy area. In this way I became acquainted with Adama, a young unmarried man in his mid twenties who had completed high school three years previously. During the period of my stay, he lived with his parents and struggled to make a livelihood through the small activities available in town. Once I encountered him late in the evening walking through the coach station. He looked sad and angry at the same time. I invited him for a *sucgeries* (soft drinks) so as to cheer him up. We sat at a table of a restaurant next to the tarred road. He then told me why he was in bad shape this evening. Like many young men he always had comical stories to narrate about flirting in Bougouni, but this time he was hurt by one of them. He had been trying to seduce a young unmarried lady he had fallen in love with a couple of months ago. He felt this affair was different because of his sincere sentiments towards her. He thought also she was a serious lady because she displayed educated manners and stayed at home in the evening. However what he saw this evening forced him to reassess his opinion. When he was wandering around in the evening he encountered two persons standing in the dark of a side street of Bougouni. Then they moved quickly to a car parked under a tree and left. Nonetheless Adama identified them: the same lady he had been trying to seduce and an elder of a neighbouring family! Such furtive meeting between a man and a woman late in the evening usually arouses suspicion of an affair of illicit sexual activities. The accusation conveys social consequences whatever the truth behind it. He was very upset because he realised that the lady had turned out to be loose and the man not the one he pretended to be. He is a successful trader and family head of Bougouni, known as a respected Muslim who never misses common Islamic duties. He often criticises youths who spend their time in *grins* instead of farming for their parents as lazy and useless; he accuses them of being more interested in women than in their family. However this evening Adama had discovered he also was among those who took Islam as mere appearance:

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<sup>170</sup> Allah akbar (Ar.).

'It makes me laugh when I see them in the big mosque. They pray with the so-called Islamic cloths and moralise the youth there. Then during the night they go visiting their young mistresses (*sunguruw*) in secrecy. This is just *maquillage* (make-up)!' Adama also lamented being in a powerless situation. As a young unmarried man without proper job, he felt he could not compete with this guy. 'He is a wealthy trader and a respected chief of family of Bougouni. He is our elder. What can I do? Nothing!' His account will nonetheless circulate among his friends and fuel the discourses of 'sincerity-hypocrisy' of public Islam found among ordinary Muslims in Bougouni.

Near to the end of my fieldwork, Salif the tailor and I often visited our friend the entrepreneur Amidou and his wife at their home in the district of Torakabougou during the evening. This newly married couple hosted a kind of night *grin* where regular friends came to chat, watch TV and drink tea in the living room and on the terrace. Their home was located off the main roads at the dead end of a quiet and small sandy street. They rented half of a cemented house. The other half was occupied by another young married couple and their baby who had moved there recently. Both families shared the same courtyard. They had a seemingly polite relationship. One evening, Salif, Amidou's wife and I were sitting quietly at the threshold of the living room. It was after midnight. Amidou was already in bed and we were about to leave. However, low voices and movements coming from the other half of the house drew our attention; we then saw a male figure leaving the house and walking out to the gate and disappearing into the night. Amidou's wife was a bit stunned. The husband of the woman next door was not at home. He had travelled to Segou for work. Therefore such a late visit by a man to a lonely married woman is deemed scandalous. Although nobody recognised this ambiguous visitor, his specific look unmasked his identity. We made out a man with a long beard wearing white Arabic style robe and shorter white trousers. Salif chuckled and commented: 'These Wahhabis foul the name of God! They hide themselves behind their Islamic dress, but this is just a *façade* (facade)!' Who was this night visitor? A lover? A marabout? Whatever the truth, a night visit in the absence of the husband always nurtures gossip about illicit sexual activities. Moral failings betray outwards sign of piety and remind ordinary Muslims that being Muslim and looking Muslim are two different things.

These two vignettes of zigzag Muslims are related to accusations of illicit sexual activities, but stories of zigzag Muslims are also frequently related to charges of corruption and embezzlement in Mali. Such accusations are routinely voiced in the *grins* and *carrés* of Bougouni.

These accusations of hypocrisy also reflect tensions between appearance and the moral world which question the nature of the real person. Whereas the attention to the visual



cultivates mundane success, people conceive what lies behind the appearance as the source of people's intentionality or morality. For Boubacar, the seller of cloth,

'Many Muslims pretend to be Muslim. When they go to the communal Friday prayer they show their Islamic *masque* (mask). However, when they go back to their activities they are capable of un-Islamic acts so as to obtain what they want'.

Not surprisingly metaphors of sight were privileged in my informants' speech idioms. Terms like 'zigzag', '*maquillage*', '*façade*' and '*masque*' indicate a discrepancy between appearance and the moral world and describe the presence of a mask-like identity and the concern about "the behindness of thing". Muslims rarely referred to the notion of 'soul' (*ni*) when they wanted to speak about the source of people's morality. Beyond the practice of public Islam, They rather understood that someone's intentionality lies in his/her '*conscience*'<sup>171</sup> or his/her '*dusu*' (heart). Often my friends explained to me that Islam is between themselves and God by putting their right hand on their chest and looking at the sky. Both terms express where the true moral nature of someone lies; an innermost being moved by emotions and sentiments which cannot escape from God.<sup>172</sup> As social reality, the concern about "the behindness of thing" points to issues of trust (*danaya*) and shifting allegiance among people in Mali.

'A good Muslim is sincere with his heart. If what you say is what is in your heart [*dusu kɔnɔ*], then you are a good Muslim. If you say something that your heart disagrees with it, this is bad' (Kassim, 35 years old, labourer in Bougouni).

Sometimes, public life in Mali asks for deceptive politeness or silence (instead of the voicing of a painful truth) so as to preserve social harmony. However, people dislike hypocrisy in Islam because such behaviour insults Islam, and more dangerously, connotes an inner being which is dominated by malicious forces. Zigzag Muslims are harshly criticised because they corrupt Islam by practising it without faith and, more importantly, with un-Islamic intentions. For them, these zigzag Muslims can seriously threaten trust and social harmony between people because they live upon 'treachery' (*janfa*), 'lie' (*nkalon*) and shifting allegiance. Someone who is able to wear and practise a mask-like religious identity in public is able to ally with occult forces when out of sight.

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<sup>171</sup> French word.

<sup>172</sup> 'Here people hide themselves to drink alcohol, but your conscience cannot escape from God' (Sekou, 42 years old, guard of hotel in Bougouni); 'Islam dwells at the bottom of heart. It is not a makeup' (Kassim, 35 years old, labourer in Bougouni).

The discourses of ‘sincerity-hypocrisy’ of public Islam I found in Bougouni criticised the instrumentalisation of public expressions of Muslim identity for two main goals: to support someone’s reputation within the local Muslim community and to cover mundane schemes of immoral and occult nature. Accusations of hypocrisy can go so far as to signify that the ‘devil’ (*sitanε*) has been unmasked!<sup>173</sup>

### ***The Islamic resource***

Reflecting on shifting morality of zigzag Muslims, Alou the student at the IFM uttered the following *Bamanan* proverb:

‘A savoury pancake has to be repeatedly turned on the grill in order to be well cooked. If the savoury pancake is cooked only on one side, this very side will burn’.<sup>174</sup>

Commenting on this proverb he said that Malians tend to have many activities and identities, but only those which are acceptable are made public. He continued by saying one should behave like a chameleon if he wants to succeed in life because ‘we do not know what tomorrow will be’; someone adapts to the ‘volatility’ of the local economy and broader political contexts (for instance, the Ivorian crisis) through the adoption of complex livelihood strategies.<sup>175</sup> For Alou, such an unstable situation promotes the presence of multiple and shifting activities and allegiances in the same person. In turn, such strategies nurture the practice of opaque moralities and the belief in occult forces in Mali.

The debate between public signs of piety and their intentions in Bougouni demonstrates that the practice of religious precepts does not necessarily subject human being to its religious path. Both, the recent democratic shifts and the older visual and ostentatious characters of sociality of street life found in urban Mali, have transformed Islamic identity into a mundane resource which is part of the broader politics of success in the Muslim society of Bougouni. Similarly to Masquelier’s findings about Niger, in Bougouni, as in the rest of Mali, Islam is now equated with status, power and wealth (2009). Living a proper Muslim life contributes to someone’s broader success in life.

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<sup>173</sup> On the relations between consumption, distinction and the occult, see chapter 5.

<sup>174</sup> *yelemen yelemen yε ηami ka ni, takula bana o ma. O kere kelen cici la.*

<sup>175</sup> On the notion of volatility applied to African contexts, see Makhulu, Buggenhagen and Jackson (2010).

The fact that people's attitude towards public norms of piety can be ambivalent show how Muslims engage with rituals, public signs and moral discourses in complex and reflexive manners which deserve to be explored, not only in their personal dimensions, but also in their social consequences.

The twofold nature of piety indicates that self-discipline is an important realm of religious virtuosity. This latter is mostly apprehended by ordinary Muslims through local social ethics (*hadamadenya*) of Mande origin. I will analyse these views through the popular figures of the noble Muslim (*hɔɔɔnya*) and the blessed child (*dubabu/barika den*) in the next chapter.

### 3. Mande identities, the noble Muslim and the blessed child

Islam in Mali is often recounted as a set of rituals, outward signs and moral discourses that shape public life; but the previous chapter demonstrates that being Muslim also involves the kind of self-discipline that informs someone's personality, maturity and blessedness in Mali. This chapter aims to explore local perceptions of this self-discipline in the two figures of the noble Muslim and the blessed child.

Many adults and elders<sup>176</sup> of Bougouni blame post-1991 liberal and democratic changes in Mali for bringing a culture of permissiveness to the town. They bemoan a current '*dégradation des mœurs*' (decline in morals) and feel nostalgic for the respect for authority that they say characterised the period before 1991. They also think the strength of local forms of social ethics has diminished. In a similar vein, others refer to an ideal remote past that was defined by displays of virtue, bravery and public respect for authority. This epoch existed before the arrival of Islam, Christianity, and also the French in southwest Mali. It was an epoch during which local people lived together in a distinctively Mande society that was divided into three main categories of persons: the noble (*hɔɔɔn*), the artisan (*namakala*) and the slave (*jon*) (Conrad and Frank 1995; Hoffman 2000).

After a brief introduction to Mande forms of status hierarchy and a consideration of their development in the context of present-day Bougouni, this chapter focuses its attention on the code of behaviour of the nobles. They are especially remembered in Bougouni with the hero cult of Diakassan Moussa Diakité, a great warrior who, according to the members of the local traditional chieftainship, was the representative of the *kafo* of Bougouni to the king of Ségou in pre-colonial times. His tomb is known to be a space blessed by God where the Diakité families meet regularly, and the locals ask for divine intervention. This ancestor represents the *Bamanan* hero who acts in line with '*hɔɔɔnya*' (nobility). This attitude still shapes the thought and identity of Muslims in the town, yet not in a static way: I explore the complex interactions between Bougouni residents' understandings of Islam and of being Muslims as they are informed by a set of sacred virtues, and by local norms and social ethics, which are widely interpreted to be of Mande origin.

Local forms of social ethics are also captured by local practices of blessing. As social acts, giving and receiving blessings are important daily rituals that show good manners and education; they also connote pious disposition. At the same time, blessing is the spiritual means through which Muslims make requests of God; blessing is about *baraka* (divine power).

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<sup>176</sup> 35 + year old.

Several anthropologists have studied the notion of *baraka* in relation to the religious elite and their lineages (Cruise O'Brien and Coulon 1998; Evers Rosander and Westerlund 1997; Schmitz 2000). By contrast I explore *baraka's* importance to ordinary Muslims through an examination of the local figure of the 'blessed child' (*barika/dubabu den*). Local discourses stipulate that the blessed child will have a successful life and, by contrast, the 'damned child' (*danga den*) a miserable fate on earth. The way blessings circulate between generations in Bougouni roots the notion of 'respect' (*bonya*) in the acceptance of traditional authority. While it reinforces local 'traditions' and 'customs' (*laada*), the notion of a path of the blessed child is increasingly contested by youths who blamed their elders for an abuse local social ethics which blighted their '*avenir*' (future).

In this chapter my aim is to assess the legacy of the Mande world within contemporary conceptions of a proper Muslim life in Bougouni. Islam has been present so long in the Mande world that it would be implausible to try to isolate its importance in the local legacy of southwest Mali. Therefore, I explore Islam and Mande culture together as important elements of *laada*.

### ***Nostalgia and moral decline***

In the course of my fieldwork in southwest Mali I regularly listened to public and private pronouncements about moral decline and the general state of '*dégradation des mœurs*' in the present epoch. Most such criticisms were made by Malians who grew up under the authoritarian regime of Moussa Traoré (1968 – 1991). Although they welcomed the post-1991 liberal and democratic processes, they rebuked the failure of development and the moral drifting<sup>177</sup> of Malians in general. For them, the state, as well as the elders, lack moral authority in the current context.

Abdoulaye was born in a village near the small town of Garalo, 50 km south of Bougouni. He moved to Bougouni in the district of Massablacoura in the early 1990s so as to find a job. He later became an electrician and got married in town. When I met him in 2009 Abdoulaye was in his late forties and the head of a large family. I used to stop regularly in his workshop where we chatted and drank tea together. Like most of his contemporaries, the events of 1991 brought him hope and new expectations. However, twenty years later, his

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<sup>177</sup> On post-1991 criticism of the climate of permissiveness, lax morals and moral corruption made by Malian Muslim preachers, see Soares (2005a).

feelings about present-day Mali are mixed. His material and economic situation has not really improved. Following Osella and Osella's analysis of the Izhavas of Kerala (2006, 584), modernity among these adult Muslims is 'about dream and disillusionment, promising progress to all while delivering to a few'.<sup>178</sup> More precisely here, his feeling of nostalgia mirrors a 'crisis of meaning' of traditional authority brought by the current transformation of moral standards in Mali (see Ferguson 1999, 14). Abdoulaye thinks the authority of elders and heads of family has decreased generally. Although he supports the idea of democracy, he believes it has not been understood properly by the majority of Malians and especially by the youth:

'Democracy arrived. But many people and the youth have only understood it as -you can do what do you like-.'<sup>179</sup>

Abdoulaye's opinions are similar to those of many Malians who have lived through the economic and political changes brought by the events of 1991. They principally upbraid the fact that democracy has been perceived by the younger generations only as permitting freedom of behaviour, hence they feel nostalgia for the respect for authority they portray as characteristic of the pre-1991 period.<sup>180</sup> Abdoulaye continued by expressing his dismay at the increasing numbers of babies born out of wedlock and the youths smoking cigarettes in front of their elders without embarrassment. For him, 'the strength of social ethics has diminished'.<sup>181</sup>

Here I use the expression 'social ethics' for the *Bamanan* noun '*hadamadenya*'.<sup>182</sup> This term has a very broad meaning that needs to be examined in detail. Primarily *hadamadenya* is composed of two words; *adama* (Adam) and *den* (child) which together means 'the son of Adam' or simply 'human being'.<sup>183</sup> In *Bamanan* the suffix '*ya*' is often added to a noun so as to express the state/condition of what is named. Therefore *hadamadenya* expresses 'the state of human being' or 'the human condition'. The Reverend and linguist Charles Bailleul, who lived 26 years in the *Bamanan* countryside,<sup>184</sup> translates it variously as 'solidarity', 'politeness' and 'social relations' (1996, 146). Thus the term of *hadamadenya* indicates that the local understanding of humanity is primarily conceived as a social ethics.<sup>185</sup> As the anthropologist

<sup>178</sup> The impact of the failure of economic development on local perceptions of modernity is analysed in chapter 5.

<sup>179</sup> *Demokrasi nana. Nka mogow ani dɔgɔw caman yé o faamu dɔɔn ko "min ka di ɛ yé, ɛ bɛ o dɛ kɛ"*.

<sup>180</sup> On similar reference to nostalgia in Mali, see Soares (2010); I develop such common findings one step further below by looking at the old social ethics of the Mande world.

<sup>181</sup> *Hadamadenya barika bana*.

<sup>182</sup> Or *adamadenya*.

<sup>183</sup> The word *den* as suffix expresses the idea of filiations (see Bailleul 1996, 81).

<sup>184</sup> See, [http://www.africamission-mafr.org/charles\\_bailleul.htm](http://www.africamission-mafr.org/charles_bailleul.htm).

<sup>185</sup> Dorothea Schulz translated '*hademadenya*' into 'humanity' (2010, 81).

Micheal Lambek (2010), my Muslim informants consider ethics to be a fundamental feature of human social action.

Many adult Muslims criticised the advent of a contemporary society characterised by the weakening of what they saw as social ethics of Mande origin. How then can we address these? Initially, we need to unpack the *Bamanan* concept of social ethics into a set of identifiable moral traits.

One of the privileged moments to listen to informal, public criticism of society between Malians is during the course of bus journey. The fact of being seated alongside one another, shoulder-to-shoulder, heading in the same direction, promotes a sharing of ideas and information through ‘companionable’ interaction instead of the more ‘confrontational’ interaction of face-to-face settings (see Lee and Ingold 2006, 79–83). Malians frequently travel by coach for business and personal purposes. Coaches are mobile spaces in which people of different backgrounds, who usually would not know each other, are put together for a couple of hours. Passengers frequently start chatting and debating freely on many subjects.<sup>186</sup> One day, I could not help overhearing a lively discussion between two Malian men sat in front of me for a typical bus journey from Bougouni to Bamako. They conversed in French on many societal issues. At one point, one of them stated that the 2002 *Coupe d’Afrique des Nations* (Africa Cup of Nations) held in Mali had promoted infidelity in his hometown Sikasso; he based his accusation on the fact that all the hotels built for hosting the various national teams there had since turned into ‘*chambres de passe*’ (rooms rented on an hourly basis). His companion vehemently criticised corruption within the Malian government and bad sexual behaviour among urbanites in general. Their exchanges continued for a couple more minutes and sparked off debates among other passengers. Then one of two concluded loudly in *bamanankan*: ‘Nobility does not exist anymore and people do not fear shame. They only sell their honour!’<sup>187</sup>

The rhetoric of this last statement resonates with judgements of moral decline and sentiments of nostalgia for an older social ethics. It also contains three notions important for understanding old social ethics: honour (*danbé*), shame (*maloya*) and nobility (*hɔɔɔnya*).<sup>188</sup> *Hɔɔɔnya* matters more in this chapter because its etymology refers to an old traditional status of Mande origin.

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<sup>186</sup> On talk as important pastime in Mali, see Schulz (2002, 812–813).

<sup>187</sup> *Sisan hɔɔɔnya tɛ ani maloya ka nie. Mɔgɔw bɛ danbé feere!*

<sup>188</sup> Honour and shame are discussed in chapters 1, 2, 6 and 7.

## ***The traditional Mande statuses***

The term Mande (or Manden, Manding) refers to a vast historical region of West Africa in which people shared common cultural features (see introduction). Among them I am particularly interested in Mande ideas of status and the forms of practice associated with them. Before treating these statuses as dynamic and multidimensional realities of contemporary Malian life, I first introduce how French administrators and scholars attempted to codify them.<sup>189</sup>

Mande society was structured into multiple groups. This complexity became codified during the colonial period under three main groups: the *hɔɔn* (free man, noble), the *ɲamakala* (artisan), and the *jon* (slave).<sup>190</sup> The tripartite system has since been known as the 'Mande caste system' (Conrad and Frank 1995, 7). Wishing to avoid any false parallel and confusion with the famous Indian caste system,<sup>191</sup> I prefer to speak of groups articulated around distinct statuses.<sup>192</sup> Each of the three groups was bound to specific activities which conferred upon it resources, power, prestige and identity. The unity and continuity of the Mande society was based on the complementarity of each group in term of a division of work. Members of these three groups did interact in village life, but followed strictly endogamous rules of marriage.<sup>193</sup> In addition to illicit intercourses, a breach of the system was produced when someone encroaches on the fundamental activities of another groups; the fact of acting in a way inappropriate to someone's social role was mostly monitored by the feeling of shame.

The *hɔɔnw*<sup>194</sup> were the freemen and nobles of Mande communities. They usually were farmers, herders and warriors and were allowed to hold political offices. The *ɲamakalaw* were the artisans of Mande villages: blacksmiths (*numu*), *griots* (*jeli*), cobblers, potters, leatherworkers (...). As the etymology of their name indicates (*ɲama.kala*), they were known to be expert in the manipulation of *ɲama*, a sort of impersonal energy that inhabits all matter and all beings.<sup>195</sup> In the *Bamanan* zone, they were also the guides of initiation societies such as

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<sup>189</sup> Contemporary historical and anthropological studies criticise the reification of status and hierarchy as fixed structure or monolithic cultural code. For instance, Bayly (1999) and Dirks (2001) explored the Indian caste system as a complex, dynamic and changing reality of daily life and politics in India since the pre-colonial times.

<sup>190</sup> On historical and linguistic analysis of caste systems in West Africa, see Tamari (1991).

<sup>191</sup> As explained by the anthropologist Barbara Hoffmann in her study of *griots* (*jeli*) of the town of Kita (Mali), 'the Mande caste system does not incorporate an opposition of purity and pollution, but rather a spectrum of differential access to various forms of social and occult power, with the potential pollution arising from inappropriate contact with the powers of other castes' (2000, 247–248).

<sup>192</sup> The notion of caste does not cover a unique system which is not comparable with other ranking systems. For instance, comparing ethnographically the Indian caste system with the ranking system of Middle East societies, Lindholm argued that both systems are primarily based on 'oppositional relations' from which social orders emerge (1985).

<sup>193</sup> Often the *ɲamakalw* lived in separate districts. On an Indian illustration of how different groups mix and interact together during the market in ways that demonstrate and reinforce their social hierarchy, see Gell (1982).

<sup>194</sup> In Arabic, *Hurr*.

<sup>195</sup> On *ɲama*, see McNaughton (1988).



the *komo*. The *jon* was the most mutable status. The slaves were usually former *hɔɔnw* enslaved through capture in battle. They could regain *hɔɔn* status through purchase of freedom over years. However, most slaves who gained freedom did so as houseborn slave (*woloso*). Slaves of second generations were usually not sold; therefore they developed special ties with their master's household that eased the accumulation of wealth necessary for the purchase of their freedom. Slaves were usually the housemaids, servants and workers of the two other groups.

### ***The Mande statuses in contemporary Bougouni***

The first chapter pointed to the regional particularities of southwest Mali. One of them is the massive enslavement of the inhabitants of south Mali more generally during the period of Samory Touré. However, except for rare elders I specifically interviewed on this subject, I never heard, either locals speaking about the past status of slave of local families, or foreigners reminding autochthons of such an inglorious past. Referring mostly to the work of the historian Peterson (see 2011, chapter 3), two main reasons explain the absence of reference to a past of enslavement in Bougouni: the large scale of enslavement experienced in exile, and the limited integration of southwest Mali in the slave trade.

The large scale of enslavement in southwest Mali undermined this marker as a meaningful distinction for locals because most of their communities were affected by it. Events did not divide local communities but united them in suffering. Their period of enslavement had been a violent breach of their life that reconstructing their communities urged them to brush aside. Indeed as slavery was experienced in exile, either in the coastal countries of West Africa or in Northern Mali, this shameful status entered historic oblivion when, after the wars of Samory and the end of legal slavery in 1905, many former slaves returned to southwest Mali and rebuilt and repopulated their ancient villages. 'Because of the exodus, descendants of slaves shed the socially embedded dispositions of being a slave, the public deference to masters, and the identification of belonging to a low-status group. Slave status, which had been experienced in exile, was a temporary marker of identity. Their "social death", as it were, had been a transitory, leaving few traces in the status of their descendants' (Peterson 2011, 89). Furthermore, as their enslavement did not last more than a generation, it did not cut them off from their past. Reconstruction of their own social identity was based on recollection

of their own past, not on the enduring stigmatisation of slavery related to a former slave's lack of personal history.<sup>196</sup> Return migration to a region of limited integration with the slave trade also eased this historical oblivion by cutting old ties of slavery;<sup>197</sup> former masters could not remind former slaves of their shameful past because they did not live in southwest Mali. In the North of Mali, such as in Tombouctou, the past status of slave still shapes social life because the families of former slaves remained next to the households of their former masters. An historical particularity has no grasp on the present if it is neither transmitted, nor are people reminded of it in one way or another.<sup>198</sup>

Although vocational differences of Mande status are losing their meaning, Malians still recognise one another's Mande status from their surname (*jamu*). The vocational dimension of caste has mostly disappeared in Bougouni. My host family well illustrates these transformations. Both parents originating from *griot* families moved to Bougouni before 1991 where they started careers within the local administration. Shortly after their arrival in town, like most families of Bougouni, they also began farming as a supplementary activity. The head of the family comes from the important *griot* lineage of Kita, but he was never involved in *griot* activities in Bougouni up to his death in 2009. Both parents belonged to the local intellectual elite and transmitted the importance of school education to their children who now work in different modern professions. None of the children is involved in *griot* activities. The *griot* status of my host family was sometimes mentioned by visitors, but mostly as a joke. As I observed during public events, *griots* are still used as mediators in conflicts or as spokesmen in wedding processes, but so far I know this was not the case for my host family.

Marriages between *jamakala-hɔrɔn* remain rare in Mali, but the economic status of the groom tends to crack the endogamous rules of the Mande caste system in urban centres. Before giving their agreement to a marital match parents used to ask for the surname of the candidate in order to know his identity by birth; however, my friends said jokingly that nowadays the parents first investigate the profession and wealth of the suitor (see chapter 5). The importance of Mande status as marker of identity has been undermined by school education, new opportunities for livelihood, and increasing migrations. However, it is difficult to assess such transformations because each family reacts differently on the basis of its Mande status. This is especially the case if their Mande status still supports their livelihood. My immediate host family abandoned their *griot* activities and worked in modern professions.

<sup>196</sup> On the importance of lack of personal history in the continuing inequality between former slaves and their masters, see de Bruijn and Pelckmans (2005).

<sup>197</sup> 'The degree to which slavery idioms were discernible in society depended on the particular ways in which localities were incorporated into the slave trade and the social patterning that resulted' (Peterson 2011, 153).

<sup>198</sup> On a general perspective on slave descent and social status in West Africa, see Klein (2009).

However, the oldest brother of my host father was still involved in 2009 in *griot* activities in Kati. His *griot* activities provided an important share of his livelihood.

Mande statuses still shape contemporary Malian life. However, they have been diffused in complex ways into broader identities and dynamics of belongings, and debates are evoked in varied moral concerns. The realities of status belonging vary according to regional particularities and situational circumstances. For instance, Malian decentralisation has brought new political offices into communities (*communes*) by election, such as membership of the local councils, and local mayors. In some communities, inhabitants refused to elect a *namakala* as mayor because, for the majority of them, only an *hɔɔɔn* can accede to a political seat. In other *communes*, locals chose a non-*hɔɔɔn* as their mayor.<sup>199</sup> The contemporary transformation of Mande statuses is a complex and dynamic subject influenced by factors such as competition over strategic resources and positions.

In Bougouni, inhabitants know the Mande status of their neighbours, but most of the time it does not matter. Following Brubaker's book *Ethnicity without groups* (2002), Mande statuses do not define sharp distinctions and groups anymore. Mande statuses are more becoming like the raw material of categories of differentiation, such as age-systems, gender or ethnic groups, which can be "cooked" (crystallised) and turned to political salience under such specific circumstances as communal elections. Otherwise, the status of former slave has no social reality, and the nobles and the artisans are engaged in the same political and livelihood activities.<sup>200</sup> However, the noble occupies a specific position in local heritage with the hero cult of Diakassan Moussa Diakité.

In the old district of Dougounina at three minutes walk from the house of the chief of the village, is a crossroads with no homes. Brick walls enclose an imposing isolated tomb and a balanzan tree in the middle of an empty square. The main cemetery of Bougouni is located in the district of Medine, but this is the tomb of Diakassan Moussa Diakité, one of the most famous ancestors of the founders of Bougouni.

According to the members of the traditional chieftainship<sup>201</sup>, Diakassan Moussa Diakité was a noble and a great warrior who left his mark on local history thanks to an epic life. He lived in pre-colonial times when the *Kafo* of Bougouni was a vassal of the kingdom of Ségou.<sup>202</sup> Since childhood he had drawn attention to himself by virtue of his precocious maturity and correct behaviour. Consequently he was sent by his elders as the representative of the *Kafo* of

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<sup>199</sup> As the Ivorian crisis has demonstrated, access to political offices has become more subjected to the factor of autochthony (and wealth) than traditional status, see Chappatte (2007); on an illustration of the influences of traditional chieftainship and kinship in the decentralised communal power in southeast Mali, see Chappatte (2005).

<sup>200</sup> Here my analysis echoes broader arguments in anthropology about the nature of culture as a resource with which people interact to produce interactive identities (see Barth 1969).

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Kaka Diakité, Bougouni, January 2009; paper on local history given by Lassina Diakité, March 2009.

<sup>202</sup> On the relations between the *Kafo* of Bougouni and the Kingdom of Ségou, see Samake (1988).

Bougouni in Ségou where he became famous for his military prowess. There he also converted to Islam, learnt Arabic language and became a fervent Muslim. Later, accompanied by a Muslim scholar, he brought Islam to Bougouni and ruled the *kafo* with rightness and justice.<sup>203</sup> On his deathbed, he implored God to immortalise his earthly achievements through a noble tree. His wish was fulfilled; a majestic *balanzan* of Abyssinia emerged next to his tomb where it endured until recently.<sup>204</sup>



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More than a century after the death of Diakassan Moussa Diakité, his grave is well maintained in Bougouni.<sup>206</sup> The path leading to the *carré* of the tomb had been repaired in 2009 by the Diakité chieftainship, a financial investment which illustrates the contemporary importance of this grave which is considered as historical heritage of Bougouni by its founding families. On the last Sunday of every month members of Diakité families gather here to praise their ancestor. The tomb focuses a kind of hero cult; indeed locals assert that God greatly blessed Diakassan Moussa Diakité. They say their ancestor did not lie, speaking truth and words of wisdom only. He could also tell the future. His tomb is a place invested with God's favour (*barika*). When a woman has difficulty giving birth, she can come to the grave to ask for a

<sup>203</sup> This narration supports the reputation of the traditional chieftainship. The Diakite are not only the founders of Bougouni but also the first Muslims of Bougouni. This historical version of the penetration of Islam in Bougouni was publicised by the local government in a 'symposium' (conference) called the *Première Semaine Régionale des Sociétés Artistiques et Culturelles* in Sikasso in 1985 (Diakite 1985). Its author, Diakite, was an autochthon and professor of letters in the only *Lycée* of Bougouni existing in 1985. I wanted to visit him. Unfortunately he passed away in 2007. I also found another document called *Premières Festivités Commémoratives de Diakassan Moussa Diakité 'Le Justicier du Banimonoté' (1780 – 1830)*. This paper was written for an official commemoration of Diakassan Moussa Diakite. The event took place from the 22-23 of May 1999 (I suppose in Bougouni). The document mentions that our hero was also the founder of the oldest Friday Mosque of Bougouni. Its authors are five members of the Diakité family including Professor Kassim Diakite. The Diakite's oral traditions of the past differ in many ways from recollections of the past I collected among other local elders and from Peterson's extensive research on the history of Islam in south Mali (2011). Southwest Mali lacks contemporary sources on the past. As oral traditions are often associated with local institutions, they are liable to manipulation by traditional power so as to legitimate present interests (see Vansina 1965; 1985).

<sup>204</sup> The *balanzan* was destroyed by a lightning around twenty years ago. The traditional chieftainship replaced it with the current one.

<sup>205</sup> Photograph 8: The Tomb of Diakassan Moussa Diakite; source ASEB (*Action Santé et Education pour Bougouni*; see [http://www.ase-bougouni.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=135&Itemid=196](http://www.ase-bougouni.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=135&Itemid=196)).

<sup>206</sup> Usually Muslims do not bury their kinsmen in a gravestone. The so-called 'Wahhabis' especially disapprove gravestones because they index the act of worship. The Muslim cemetery of Bougouni contains only a few gravestones that are usually related to local notables.

delivery of a healthy child. If God fulfils the request, the beneficiary has to give an offering<sup>207</sup> (*saraka*) to God through the intermediary of the chief of the village (the sacrificial officer). If the new-born child is a boy, his name will be Moussa. If she is a girl, her name will be Diakassan. Locals come to his grave with other requests as well.

The hero cult of Diakassan Moussa Diakité supports the reputation of the traditional chieftainship by praising their great ancestor for his rightness and his pious character.<sup>208</sup> In parallel to its political dimension, the narrative of Diakassan Moussa Diakité celebrates the notion of *hɔɔnya* (the noble attitude), remembered as a *Bamanan* chivalrous ethic that still inspires Muslims in present-day Bougouni. The concept of *hɔɔnya* is explored in the next section through the figure of the noble Muslim.

### ***The noble Muslim***

Brought up in 'generic Islam' most ordinary Malian Muslims learn the rudiments of Islamic dogma and rituals during their teenager years (see chapter 2). Then they practise 'generic Islam' more or less diligently. Nonetheless such 'generic Islam' does not indicate how a Muslim should act in social life. Learning good manners takes place on a daily basis from a very young age within the familial compound, in the neighbourhood, and on the streets of the locality; this education is an intrinsic dimension of social life which transmits values proper to the cultural backdrop of southwest Mali. In this regard, *Bamanaya*, as an important element of this cultural backdrop (see chapter 1), shapes the good manners associated with the local conceptions of proper Muslim life. Here, *Bamana.ya* does not mean the *Bamanan* religion; its suffix *-ya* evokes instead 'the *Bamanan* condition' or what it is 'to be *Bamanan*'. Taken as a whole this *Bamanan* condition incorporates a set of ethical dispositions bound to Mande statuses; but in this analysis, to be *Bamanan* means to be *hɔɔn*.

'If you ask people to help you catch a lion when you are holding its tail, nobody will help you. However, if you get the lion's head, they will help you' (on *hɔɔnya*, Ahmed, Bogolan maker in Bougouni).

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<sup>207</sup> Cock, goat, cow, amount of money (...).

<sup>208</sup> The anthropologist Mary Jo Arnoldi illustrated how the longstanding tradition of verbal praising of heroic deeds of individuals in Mali has recently become expressed in public monuments as well. Between 1995 and 2002 the government of Alpha Oumar Konaré built more than forty commemorative monuments in Bamako which promote 'a shared postcolonial national identity' as well as 'the political legitimacy of the Third Republic'. Many of them represent the heroes of Mali's independence struggle and student leaders of Mali's pro-democracy movement (see 2007).

As evoked in this quotation and argued by Hoffman (2000, 14), Mande statuses are not just a matter of profession and kinship, their boundaries are also based on ‘ranges of behavioural, psychological, and philosophical differences’: Hoffman defines *hɔɔɔnya* as ‘the state of being noble’ (Ibid, 16); the category of person someone belongs to should be identifiable in the way they act. For instance, Hoffman writes that ‘the behaviour of an *hɔɔɔn*, according to the Guinean *hɔɔɔn* scholar Sory Camara, is distinguished by its “sense of honour, restraint, respect of convention in all daily behaviours”’<sup>209</sup> by contrast to the exuberant, energetic and shameless behaviour of the *griot* (for instance) (Ibid, 87).<sup>210</sup> In a similar vein to Hoffman, I am interested here in Mande statuses as a matter of ethical disposition. Indeed the *Bamanankan*-French dictionary written by Reverend Charles Bailleul translates *hɔɔɔnya* into the ethical terms of freedom, independence, nobility, honesty, loyalty and high morality (1996). Most anthropologists have focused on the study of *ɲamakalaw*,<sup>211</sup> only sometimes referring to *hɔɔɔn*. The category of *hɔɔɔn* has been taken-for-granted rather than investigated, an oversight I try to make good through an ethnography of the noble Muslim in southwest Mali.

During my stay in Bougouni, I undertook several trips to rural southwest Mali, especially to visit my friend Moussa whom I met in the big market of Bougouni. Moussa spent his early childhood with an uncle who lived in Côte d’Ivoire. When he was approximately 10 years old, he was sent to his village of origin in southwest Mali so as to help his parents with farming. He nonetheless managed to attend school in the neighbouring small town of Garalo until the 9<sup>th</sup> academic year, when he dropped out without obtaining the *Diplôme d’Etudes Fondamentales* (DEF).<sup>212</sup> When I met him in 2009 he was a married man and father in his early forties who lived next to his oldest brother and his mother in the village of Siramana. His activities were multiple. Like everyone he was engaged in farming. He also gardened. As the most educated person of the village, he became a sort of public writer who helped illiterate villagers with bureaucracy and letters. He was also involved in the committees of various local associations such as the *Association Villageoise* (AV) of his locality that represents villagers producing cotton. Furthermore he was the representative and informant of the *Centre de Santé Communautaire* (CSCOM) of Kologo in Siramana. His involvement in the area has provided him with valuable insights into social life there. Moussa is an autochthon of the area who has developed a particular interest in local history and enjoys being engaged in

<sup>209</sup> Her own translation; for primary reference, see Camara (1976).

<sup>210</sup> Hoffman also mentions that in quotidian contexts a young *hɔɔɔn.muso* (noble woman) is usually ‘quiet, dignified, soft-spoken, gentle, somewhat shy, always genteel, and fiercely loyal to her best friend’ (2000, 246). In another text Hoffmann describes the sobriety of a young noblewoman when listening to her praise: ‘she sits still and calm, dignified in cool silence, not even deigning to look at “her” griot’ (1995, 38). Gender differences are incorporated into Mande statuses, but due to the impact on my fieldwork of gendered division of local society my study refers primarily to *hɔɔɔn.ke* (noble man).

<sup>211</sup> The reasons for this academic emphasis on *ɲamakalaw* are probably numerous. One of them is that *ɲamakala* appears to be the most alien category forming the Mande world for Westerners, see McNaughton (1995).

<sup>212</sup> Diploma of Fundamental Studies.

philosophical debates late into the night. He also keeps a small collection of books on various subjects in his room, and he sometimes brings one out during discussion so as to reinforce his point of view and to share his knowledge.

One day, Moussa, his younger brother, his friend Ahmed and I were walking across the fields surrounding the village of Siramana. Our destination was the summit of a small hill ahead of us where we hoped we would be able to find weak mobile telephone signals coming from the antenna in Bougouni. Moussa had to call a friend in town. At some point in our walk, Moussa started to chant:

‘If you are Christian, you do not lie’  
‘If you are Muslim, you do not commit adultery’  
‘If you are noble, you do not rob’<sup>213</sup>

Intrigued by the relation made by Moussa between social ethics and the category of noble, as well as by the juxtaposition between nobility, Islam and Christianity,<sup>214</sup> I asked him what he meant by *hɔɔn* in his song. Then he replied:

‘*Hɔɔn* is nobility. It comes from before Islam and Christianity. Our religion was *hɔɔnya*. Our ancestors did not lie. They did not rob. They were upright.’<sup>215</sup>

Moussa is representative of ordinary Muslims who value the moral legacy of their ancestors. Instead of ignoring the past, they tend to build bridges between Islam and Mande culture. Some of them even question the contribution of Islam to local ethics. In Bougouni, Fousseini the carter (*wɔɔɔɔɔɔɔɔ*) stated: ‘Islam brought prayer and fasting here, but nothing else. In terms of morality, we still live the way our ancestors did.’ Most Muslims would not go as far as Fousseini’s view of Islam as practice without moral precept. Most Muslims would also disagree with Moussa who equates *hɔɔnya* with religion. However their [Moussa and Fousseini] interest in old social ethics illustrates a point I noticed among Muslims in southwest Mali: local conceptions of proper Muslim life are inspired by social ethics of Mande origin. Besides this common anthropological observation I want to stress that, whereas these Muslims cultivate the formation of common grounds between Islam and Mande culture, scholars downplay the impact of Mande culture in Malian life; some even store it in museums. But people in Bougouni think ‘the Muslim and the noble are the same’ (*silame yé hɔɔn yé*); this local saying

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<sup>213</sup> *Ni ɛ yé krétien yé, ɛ tɛ galon tige. Ni ɛ yé silame yé, ɛ tɛ jeneya ke. Ni ɛ yé hɔɔn yé, ɛ tɛ sonya ke.*

<sup>214</sup> It was not the first time I listened to someone making a connection between Islam and nobility, but this time I asked for details of the resemblance.

<sup>215</sup> I have translated from French to English, keeping the *Bamanan* words Moussa used.

expresses the figure of the noble Muslim. Loyalty and sincerity are among the most valued virtues expressed in this that I detected in the field.

One day I visited a Muslim friend who lived in the roadside village of Sido located 30 km north of Bougouni. In late afternoon we spent some time by the roadside in the workplace of his friend Aziz, the laundry worker. On this day Aziz's *grin* included six of us: a teacher, an Imam, a farmer, Aziz, my friend and I. As usual the men were chatting and drinking tea while observing activities around. Then, a well-digger came and complained about the fact that he found a plastic bag full of shit in the well he was digging and also in his own well. People were outraged by such a story. The debate became heated. For several speakers such odious acts were linked to 'egoism' (*negoya*) and 'evil spells' (*dabali*).<sup>216</sup> Aziz added vehemently that such hidden goings-on demonstrate the un-Islamic identity of their perpetrator and the lack of *hɔɔɔnya* in general in Mali! Later, when the *grin* was appeased and less crowded, I asked Aziz if he could tell me more about what the term *hɔɔɔnya* conveyed to him in his previous intervention. Then Aziz told me that some 'old things' (*ko kɔɔ*) still pervade Mali in the shape of 'custom and tradition' (*laada*) such as the *hɔɔɔnya*. He continued by saying:

'Islam found nobility here (...) Nobility has not disappeared, but it has diminished (...). Nobility is about commitment. A noble does not lie. He does not betray as well. He does what he says. He keeps his word (...) His word is his honour. A good Muslim should behave like a noble.'<sup>217</sup>

What Aziz deplores the most about the reported event is the fact of the perpetrator remaining hidden; this is not a noble act because the noble, although he wages war against someone, is transparent in his behaviour. Aziz's remark shows that how to behave in relationship to the domain of secrecy is an important part of human ethics (Bok 1989). Coming back to the zigzag Muslims of the chapter 2, people's ideas of nobility in Bougouni respond to issues of 'trust' (*danaya*) and shifting allegiance that threaten social harmony in town. For Aziz, the story of the plastic bag full of shit found in the well conceals a betrayal. Later in our conversation Aziz developed the reasons for the decrease of *hɔɔɔnya* in Mali:

'Two things have weakened nobility: fear and greed. When you fear or you are selfish, you cannot tell the truth, therefore your word is null' (...) 'Now *modes de vie* [lifestyles] change. People do not satisfy themselves with a bicycle. We want a Jakarta. Next we want a car. People here think about building a big house with *étages*; this is what we wish to be done. We do not want to leave this earth

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<sup>216</sup> On occult power, see chapter 5.

<sup>217</sup> *Silameya sɔɔɔra hɔɔɔnya yan (...) Hɔɔɔnya ma tunun, nka a dɔɔɔyara' (...) 'Hɔɔɔnya o promesi de don. Hɔɔɔn tɛ galon tige. Ale tɛ janfa kɛ fɛnɛ. A bɛ min fo, A bɛ a kɛ (...) A danbɛ bɛ kuma kɔɔ. Silame yɛ hɔɔɔn yɛ.*



before achieving that [laughing]. We look at rich people. We want to live like them, but we are poor. To do so, some take loans. Others steal people. Greed has undermined our *hɔɔɔnya*.<sup>218</sup>

As Aziz suggests, liberal and democratic processes brought by the events of 1991 have been understood by ordinary Malians in term of a change of '*modes de vie*' (lifestyles). This transformation of lifestyles is mostly observed through material consumption. The bicycle has become outdated. Malians are nowadays looking for expensive motor vehicles, and for cemented houses with storeys.<sup>219</sup> However, these material changes have accentuated distinctions of wealth, as they have also inflamed sentiments of greed (*nata*); both have, in turn, undermined old social ethics (such as represented by *hɔɔɔnya*) among Malian Muslims.

Aziz's opinion of social changes resonates with previously nostalgic quotes of Malians for the past. Moving my analysis one step further, I argue all their comments refer to the golden age of Mande culture that has been transmitted from generation to generation through anecdotes, bits of recollections, family histories, praise songs and oral epics. This past is remembered as a virtuous past in which, like Diakassan Moussa Diakité, heroic figures acted in line with *hɔɔɔnya*. For many ordinary Muslims, the noble Muslim is taken as the Mande ideal-type of a good Muslim which inspires ordinary Muslims in their daily life. In this way, a good Muslim should keep his words, face difficulties with bravery and have a strong and transparent mind. The integrity of the good Muslim warns him against using un-Islamic occult power (see chapter 5). In their public sermons and in their cassette-sermons many Muslim preachers (such as Cherif Ousmane Madani Häidara) also use the concept of *hɔɔɔnya* so as to make explicit for their *Bamanan* audience what it means to be a good Muslim.

The figure of 'the noble Muslim' has also changed the nature of nobility in Mali. As explained before, Mande society was structured into three groups: the nobles, the artisans and the slaves. With the rare exception of slaves who managed to purchase their freedom, Mande status was ascriptive, an endowment of individuals at birth. You were *hɔɔɔn* because of your noble birth. As *hɔɔɔn* you were expected to act in line with the *hɔɔɔnya*. A *ɲamakala* could never be *hɔɔɔn* and vice versa. A *hɔɔɔn* could not act as a *ɲamakala* without bringing shame on him and his parents and vice versa. Mande society was divided into three endogamous groups in which the blood of their lineages was carefully controlled by the whole society. However, the noble Muslim, as it is now, is based on Mande status as a matter of ethical disposition. When Moussa and Aziz refer to *hɔɔɔnya*, in this context they do not consider the Mande status

<sup>218</sup> *Fen fila yé hɔɔɔnya cɛn: siran ani nata. Ni ɛ siranna wa nata be i la, ɛ te se ka cɛn fo (...). Sisan, modes de vie yelemana. Negeso o man jii! An be Jakarta fe. O kɔfe, an be a fe ka mobili san. An fe, mɔɔɔw be a fe ka so.ba ani étages jo.* On veut ça. On ne veut pas quitter ce monde sans avoir ces choses (rire). On regarde les riches. On veut être comme eux ! *Nka waritigi ani faantan, o te kelen yé !* Alors les gens prennent des *juruw*. D'autres volent ! C'est *nata* qui a gâté notre *hɔɔɔnya*!

<sup>219</sup> On more details concerning changes in consumption in Mali, see chapter 5.

as status by birth. The figure of the noble Muslim has transformed the nature of nobility into a performed status; the Mande caste system is transcended by the Islamic precept of equality of human beings in front of God.<sup>220</sup> My Muslim friends in Sido concluded: 'Someone can be *hɔɔɔn* in his attitude and his conduct even though he is a *nyamɔɔɔden* (bastard child). We say it now in Mali.' However, this performative conception of status does not mean the definitive collapse of the Mande status at birth. Mande statuses remain a raw material of categories of differentiation which can be 'cooked' and turned to political salience under specific circumstances. The issue of communal elections in Mali, for instance, illustrates that the competition over political office can narrow *hɔɔɔn* status into a status ascribed at birth. In general, the fact of scarcity of resources is an incentive to develop exclusive claim through sharper group boundaries.<sup>221</sup>

### ***Blessing and the power of the invisible***

Before moving to Bougouni I lived two months in Bamako where I attended intensive *Bamanan* classes. Knowing my interest in Islam, my teacher devoted specific lessons to the vocabulary of the religious in Mali. Approaching the end of the training period in *Bamanan* language, he wanted me to learn how 'to bless someone' (*ka dubabu ke mɔɔɔ la*) in *Bamanankan*; he stated that 'blessing' (*dubabu*) is crucial to the Muslim society of Mali in many ways that he wished me to discover in the course of my sojourn in Bougouni. We spent an entire morning studying how and when to bless someone in *Bamanankan*. At that moment I was not highly motivated to learn how to bless someone, because I found this practice alien to my habits. Shortly after this somewhat boring lesson I moved to Bougouni. However, future experiences in the field made me change my mind about the usefulness of this lesson.

Six months later I realised that I regularly blessed people in *Bamanankan*. I did not know when I started to do so. I simply became aware of my attitude in the midst of a blessing I was uttering when visiting an elder. Why did I not notice it before? Part of the answer lies in the fact that in Muslim households the act of blessing belongs to the quotidian in Mali; therefore it slips into the unremarked phenomena of social life, as, indeed to ideas about Islam and being Muslim themselves. For instance, in the town of Djenné (centre of Mali)

<sup>220</sup> Faisal Devji explored how some Muslims thinkers and radical militants have attempted to define Muslim identity in anti-national and anti-racial ways by associating the categories of Arab and Persian with their chivalric spirits of pre-Islamic origin (2008, chapter 4).

<sup>221</sup> In Madagascar, whereas Astuti documents the performative identity of the Vezo fishermen (1995), Brown analyses how the Betsileo turned slave descent into a basis of discrimination when land became scarce (2004).

Mommersteeg noticed that ‘blessings (...), recur throughout conversations and throughout the day’ (2009, 74). Illustrations of blessing in the quotidian of Bougouni are numerous. For instance, after breakfast parents give blessings to their children before going to school. They ask God to help their children to be successful at school. During a visit, final farewells are punctuated by blessings. The host and visitor exchange blessings for health and peace between them. When members of the family need to travel, their parents ask God to give them a safe journey. Before leaving home and going to the centre of Bougouni, I said goodbye to adult members of my family. They then replied ‘May God give us lots of pleasure today’<sup>222</sup> or ‘May God give us a smooth day’<sup>223</sup>, and I concluded by ‘May God grant your blessing’.<sup>224</sup> Such practices of blessing are commonly uttered during visits, greetings, comings and goings.

Some locals were amazed to hear a white man giving blessings in *Bamanankan*; often they exclaimed: ‘You became *Bamanan*!’<sup>225</sup>, or ‘You became Malian!’<sup>226</sup> In retrospect, I think my involvement in daily practices of blessing eased my integration into local Muslim society because these practices are constitutive of local social ethics; as Muslim etiquette they shape politeness, good manners and pious disposition in Mali.<sup>227</sup> Similarly than in my analysis of *hɔɔɔnya*, the practices of blessing cover realities that reflect *hadamadenya*.

However, primarily one should know that the domain of blessing, unlike *hɔɔɔnya*, is not confined to human virtues. Blessing is the religious act through which Muslims make requests of God. In a conversation in *Bamanankan* when the speaker starts with ‘*Ala ka*’ (May God) and then his/her interlocutor answers ‘*amiina*’<sup>228</sup> (amen) you are in the presence of a blessing. Muslims can also pronounce blessings alone in a room, such as in *maraboutic* practices (see further below).<sup>229</sup> In both situations, it is a speech act which involves three agents: the giver of blessing, the receiver of blessing, and God. The last agent, God, brings blessing its spiritual dimension.

‘God is visible and intervenes on earth, but God has no contour’ (Youssouf, 27 years old, hip-hop singer in Bougouni).

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<sup>222</sup> *Ala ka an tile heere caya.*

<sup>223</sup> *Ala ka an tile ngɔya.*

<sup>224</sup> *Ala ka dubabu mine.*

<sup>225</sup> *Ɛ kera Bamanan yé!*

<sup>226</sup> *Ɛ kera Malian yé!*

<sup>227</sup> On similar daily blessings in Djenné, see Mommersteeg (2009, chapter 4).

<sup>228</sup> Or *ami* (diminutive).

<sup>229</sup> Islamic esoteric practices of Western African tradition (see *marabout* in the glossary).

According to Islam, God is beyond any representation, and any worldly reproduction of God (e.g. image, statue) is prohibited as an act of idolatry. By saying 'God has no contour' Youssouf agrees with this Islamic dogma. For Youssouf, nonetheless, God is felt on earth.

It is through the very act of blessing that Muslims ask for God's favour on earth. In this way, the interventions of God on earth become visible, but the origin of this divine power remains mysterious therefore invisible. This is the why, in my analysis, the act of blessing refers also to 'God as the power of the invisible' that can alter someone's life. In this regard a marabout interviewed by Mommersteeg explained that 'there are three kinds of events. Firstly, there are things that happen to us; we cannot avoid them. Secondly, there are things that we can get; however, we need to ask God for them through blessing' (2009, 80–81).<sup>230</sup>

Especially in life-cycle rituals and during moments of uncertainty and suffering, Muslims pronounce blessing so as to summon divine power to their side. For instance, an Islamic baptism in Bougouni always concludes with the ritual of blessings. In a typical situation, men gather in the *carré* of the parents of the newborn (7 days old) after the first prayer of the day.<sup>231</sup> Muslim scholars sit on carpets. Around them, men sit on benches and chairs rented for the occasion. They listen to Muslim scholars who recite the appropriate sura in Arabic for the religious baptism. At this moment the newborn receives a Muslim name and enters into the Muslim community. When Muslim scholars have finished their ceremony, a designated man stands up and announces in a loud voice, 'We are now going to make blessings'.<sup>232</sup> Then, silence and an ambiance of concentration invest the crowd. Men place their palms in front of their face so as to be ready to receive blessings. The leading Muslim scholar then pronounces a long series of blessings in *Bamanankan* punctuated by the '*amiinas*' of the crowd.<sup>233</sup> Some men devotionally touch their forehead during the '*amiinas*'. This body language expresses concentration and shows where blessings are supposed to enter into the body. The blessings are made for the newborn and the attendant congregation of Muslims. They ask God to protect the newborn against illness, misfortune and the work of Satan. They also solicit God to grant health and prosperity on earth for the Muslims present. Although the content of the blessings varies according to the creativity of the speaker, in general, blessings solicit God's protection and favour on earth.

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<sup>230</sup> My own translation; the same marabout explained that there are other things we request through offerings; the practices of offerings (*saraka*) also exist in Bougouni, but they are not explored in this chapter.

<sup>231</sup> In Mali, religious baptism is gendered. The mother of the newborn and the other women living in the *carré* do not participate directly in the religious baptism. They stay behind in the courtyard and prepare tea and mayonnaise bread which are going to be distributed when the ceremony is finished. However in the afternoon, women perform the customary baptism. They gather together in the same place for a more festive celebration that includes gift-giving, music and dance.

<sup>232</sup> *An be dubabu ke sisan*.

<sup>233</sup> For illustrations of such long series of blessing, see Mommersteeg (2009, 75; 77).

‘Islam is about blessing; I mean not in the Mosque, but alone during the night between you and God when everybody sleeps and nobody disturbs you. Me, I know how to use the *wurudi* [Islamic rosary]. Each evening after the prayer I pronounce blessings so as to find *sababu numan* [divine cause]<sup>234</sup> (...). All the good things I got in Ivory Coast, I got them thanks to blessings’ (Amidou, 48 years old, farmer and carpenter in Bougouni).

Besides his main activities of farming and carpentry, Amidou has not forgotten the six years he spent in *duguma kalan* (traditional Islamic school) in Bamako during his teenagehood. *Duguma kalan*, although in decline due to the setting-up of Islamic *médersa* (French-Arab modern schools) during the postcolonial period, still exist in southwest Mali. Their learning system is an initiatic transmission of esoteric knowledge between master and disciple through which maraboutic practices can be acquired.<sup>235</sup> These practices consist of the manipulation of the words of the Qur’an in order to affect the lives of people. From that early period, Amidou learnt some maraboutic practices he still performs today. In his view, the cement house he built in Bougouni would not have been possible without the well-paid job he had in Ivory Coast before the civil war, which he believes he secured thanks to the maraboutic practices that gained him God’s favour.

Marabouts are the experts in asking favours from God. They do so through the practice of various Islamic esoteric sciences or what is called *maraboutage* in the French colonial lexicon. Among these various maraboutic practices, Amidou stressed the importance of long, lonely and demanding series of blessings he uttered during the night when his family was asleep. Muslims ask for marabouts’ services because they are known to be closer to God than ordinary Muslims.<sup>236</sup> This closeness to God is based on the knowledge of the ‘esoteric secrets’ (Ar., *sirr*) and piety as *barika*.

The etymology of *barika* is from the Arabic term *baraka* (or *barakah*), a prominent Sufi concept that is commonly related to blessing and the gift of grace. This concept has widely been studied in social sciences. Most anthropologists have focused on the charismatic and institutional characteristics of *baraka* in order to make explicit the linkages between the quality of grace and the worldly privileges (wealth and power) of Sufi religious authorities in West Africa (Brenner 1984; Cruise O’Brien and Coulon 1998; Geertz 1968; Soares 2005b). For instance, in the edited book called *African Islam and Islam in Africa* most social scientists

<sup>234</sup> *Sababu numan* is the divine cause that helps Muslim to build a successful life. This complex expression is explored in chapter 4.

<sup>235</sup> According to Brenner, this learning system is based on an ‘esoteric episteme’; it is ‘a hierarchical conceptualization of knowledge, the highest “levels” of which are made available to only relatively few specialists. Knowledge is transmitted in an initiatic form and is closely related to devotional praxis. The acquisition of knowledge is progressively transformative: one must be properly prepared to receive any particular form of knowledge, the acquisition of which can provide the basis for a subsequent stage of personal transformation [e.g. the spiritual hierarchies of the Sufi orders]’ (see 2001, 18).

<sup>236</sup> On an analysis of *maraboutic* practices in Niore-du-Sahel (Mali), see Soares (2005b).

define *baraka* as a beneficial force of divine origin that is the source of power and authority of saint lineages in Africa (Evers Rosander and Westerlund 1997).

Such analyses of *baraka* among Muslim elites are relevant, but they do not entirely capture the meanings and implications of *baraka* for ordinary Muslims. Here, I would cite the statement of the fieldwork assistant of the anthropologist Geert Mommersteeg in Djenné that: '*baraka* is for everybody' (2009, 151). I also take a lead from Mommersteeg who studied *baraka* among ordinary Muslims in Djenné through the Songhay figure of the blessed child (see Ibid, 147-148), although his main interest remained the *marabouts* of Djenné. Combining these two approaches, in the next section I explore the meanings and implications of the notion of *barika* for ordinary Muslims through the *Bamanan* figure of the blessed child. I do so by making links with the notion of *hadamadenya*.

### ***The blessed child***

In *Bamanankan* the blessed child is called either *barika den*, or *dubabu den*. Both terms [*barika*; *dubabu*] mean blessing. Some local Muslims do not distinguish the terms. Others do so in terms of their origins. As my Muslim friends said '*Dubabu* and *barika* are linked like rice and sauce'. Whereas *dubabu* is conferred by human beings, *barika* is only given by God. As explained by Boubacar the seller of cloths: 'People give blessings. God may transform their blessings into *barika*'.<sup>237</sup> In other words, Muslims said that God turns a deaf ear to blessings uttered by someone without *barika* because only a good Muslim can attract God's favour. God, as power of the invisible, is named '*barika*' when divine power acts in human life.

In this way a *barika den* is automatically a *dubabu den* because God has granted people's blessings upon him. However a *dubabu den* is not necessarily a *barika den* because people's blessings may not be fulfilled by God. Only God can put a child on the blessed path.<sup>238</sup> *Dubabu* expresses the social dimension of blessing and *barika* its spiritual dimension. Local discourses I collected contained inconsistencies because people refer to the social and the spiritual in complex and contested ways; but both terms speak about the blessed child.

'If you do not have *barika* and someone gives you millions of francs, you will not be able to build something. You will only waste your money. However, If you have *barika* and you possess only one

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<sup>237</sup> *Mɔgɔw bɛ dubabu di. Ala bɛ barika kɛ dubabu fɛ.*

<sup>238</sup> Boubacar the seller of cloths said 'Blessing is the path where *barika* lays' (*Dubabu yɛ sira min bɛ taa barika yɛ*).

pack of cigarettes in your shop, step by step your trade will prosper. Sooner or later, you will be rich' (Lamine, student at the IFM of Bougouni).

In general, a blessed child is someone who enjoys a successful life. All that they undertake in life blooms because God has blessed them. How then do Muslims define this blessedness? Often Muslims refer to the blessed child when a lucky phenomenon occurs. For instance, once Salif the tailor received unexpected mobile credits of 1,000fcfa. The sender of these mobile credits probably dialled Salif's number in error; nonetheless his friend exclaimed 'You are a blessed child!' In another illustration, when we were sitting on a bench near the tarred road and observing activities around we saw policemen systematically checking motorbikes passing by. However, one of the riders was not stopped. The policemen seemed to ignore him. He simply continued freely on his way. My friend commented, 'This guy is a blessed child!' Luck (*garijεε*) is never a random phenomenon in Mali. *Garijεε* is God's favour that accompanies the blessed child throughout his life. God protects the blessed child and eases the building of his life: the blessed child avoids misfortune and enjoys success.

When I asked my Muslim friends how to become a blessed child, they referred to a set of attitudes that together define a peculiar path that originates from within the family and proceeds in the community.

The blessed child is, above all, a 'child' (*den*); a child is by definition dependent on its parents. In this way the expression - blessed child - reminds the listener that any individual belongs to a specific line of descent. This lineage is imprinted on the child. The way parents and ancestors behaved still shapes their descendants. This legacy is a sort of spiritual momentum which is transmitted from generation through generation through kinship; put differently, this hereditary principle influences the life of each generation, and in turn, each generation shapes it as well.<sup>239</sup> According to local discourses, '*barika den*' as a hereditary principle mostly depends on the attitude of a wife towards her husband. It is said that God blesses children if their mother respects her husband, is faithful and obeys him. In practice, this submission of wife to husband reinforces traditional gender relations and the confinement of woman within the home: that is cooking, household chores and child rearing. Locals stressed that a *dubabu den* cannot be a *barika den* if his/her mother did not respect her husband. This point was particularly stressed by most of my Muslim friends.

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<sup>239</sup> The blessed child as hereditary principle has been put forward by saint lineages in Africa so as to keep *barika* within the same family by transmitting it from father to son (see Evers Rosander and Westerlund 1997). This hereditary principle was questioned by Schmitz in his study of the transmission of *baraka* between Muslim scholars and their disciples in the valley of Senegal. Here *baraka* is primarily explored as spiritual and charismatic kinship between master and disciple. The fluid nature of *baraka* allows the master to transmit his *baraka* to his spiritual son who may not be his biological son (2000).

‘Of course God appreciates someone who is hard worker and respectful towards his elders; but if the mother of this individual did not respect her husband, sooner or later her child will collect the consequences of her bad behaviour’ (Sitafa, entrepreneur in Bougouni).

This peculiar path of blessedness extends beyond the family and reaches the community. The blessed child is the one who seeks blessings of people in general and blessings of his parents and his elders in particular. It is said that God listens more carefully to the blessings of parents on their children and to the blessings of the elders in general. Behind this popular belief lies the idea that those of the older generation are closer to God than the younger generation because their piety matures. This is why the blessed child obeys his parents and elders. Obedience is often expressed by Malians through the term ‘*bonya*’ that they translate in French as *respect* (respect). In practice this respect towards parents and elders is related to politeness, gift-giving and consideration.

For instance, I accompanied Lamine to visit his parents, who live in a village near the town of Yanfolila in southwest Mali. Since he left his home village Lamine has returned every three months. He never visits there without seeking out his elders. Shortly after we arrived in the village, he searched for the head of his family (*gwa*). He greeted him and gave him 1000fcfa. The old man thanked him with a series of blessings. He then did the same with another elder of the family. Finally he greeted his mother and gave her 2,000 fcfa. She blessed him at length. As Lamine told me, ‘the strength of a man comes from his source (...). The elders will be pleased with me and will bless me.’ This example of consideration towards kin elders by a member of the younger generation being expressed through gift-giving is typical in southwest Mali. It demonstrates that the path of the blessed child strengthens the Mande traditional authority of the elders (the gerontocracy). Moreover, the potential spiritual award related to this path reinforces the legitimacy of its social dimension.

‘The mother is sacred in Mali. We fear disobeying her because we fear her curse’ (Lamine, student at the IFM of Bougouni).

In parallel to seeking the blessings of their parents and their elders, the younger generation avoid conflicts with them because they fear their curse.<sup>240</sup> The curse (*danga*) is the opposite of the blessing. As blessing, the curse can be pronounced by human beings, but it is only given by God. By contrast to the blessed child, the damned child (*danga den*) is blamed as uneducated,

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<sup>240</sup> Many Malians state that the curse as well as the blessing of the mother is stronger than that of the father.



impolite, lazy and selfish. It is said that such person can only encounter misery and misfortune on earth. Narrations of the consequences of such curses are frequently voiced by the inhabitants of Bougouni.

To illustrate, one day I accompanied my friend Shiaka, a local NGO worker, to the burial of the mother of one of his neighbours. As people pointed to the fact that some family members could not come to the burial, Shiaka remembered a similar event during the last month of his mother's life.

Shiaka stayed at his mother's bedside in Koutiala. As her health deteriorated, members of the families hastened to her side. All the close members of her family were at his mother's bedside except for her first son who lived in Bamako. She asked him to be present. Shiaka called him several times and begged him to come because his mother was dying. The days passed, but the oldest son still did not come. He eventually took a coach from Bamako and arrived in Koutiala after a long journey. However, he came too late, even narrowly missing her burial. His mother had passed away a couple of hours previously and, according to custom, was buried shortly after her death. People were shocked by his late arrival that was interpreted as expressing total disrespect for his mother's wishes. Elders of the family warned him about the possible consequences of his shameful act.

A couple of years later, the oldest brother of Shiaka encountered successive misfortunes. The cement house he built in Bamako was destroyed by the local authorities. The Malian state did not recognise his title deed; apparently his house was not erected on proper residential land. At the same time, his wife asked for a divorce. For Shiaka, his oldest brother was reaping what he had sown. His mother simply damned him for dishonouring her on her deathbed.

Whatever the objectivity of Shiaka's recollection, it emphasises a very important point: elders and parents, and above all a person's mother should be respected. The path of the blessed child is transmitted from generation to generation as a 'gatekeeper' of a broad Mande kinship system. The ways blessings circulate between generations and gender in Bougouni inform how social life is rooted in respect for traditional authority and custom (*laada*). In addition, the spiritual dimension of blessing strengthens its social ramifications.

'Blessing is the respect by and the acceptance of your parents, your elders. It is a life principle. It is a philosophy. It is deep. It is the fact of God. If you follow it, your life will be eased. It is like that here. If you refuse to help your parents, they will get irritated. They can even curse you. If you run away from them you will only collect misfortune there' (Lamine, student at the IFM of Bougouni).

The changes brought by the events of 1991 have also put in question the path taken by the blessed child. The discourses of nostalgia voiced by adult Muslims mirror the ways that new economic opportunities in town have undermined the traditional power relations between generations in Mali. Whereas elders think their traditional authority has decreased generally, the youth aspire to more autonomy and independence. As illustrated in the story below, the youths tend to contest the traditional control of elders over their resources, work and general lifestyle.

During my stay in Bougouni I regularly stopped by a restaurant situated by the side of the tarred road towards the exit to Sikasso. I appreciated its warmth and comfortable ambiance; there, the clientele could sit on proper chairs and eat at clean tables while watching TV. Moreover, this place was among the few indoor restaurants of Bougouni which offered local dishes at the same price as the numerous cheap eating outdoor places called *gargote*.<sup>241</sup> Over the months I became friends with the manager, Ablaye, a young man in his mid twenties who had grown up in a village in southwest Mali. After obtaining the DEF he had moved to Bougouni to pursue his studies. Although he dropped out of high school, he managed to transform the *gargote* of his older sister Oumou into a successful restaurant.

Many clients told me '*Ablaye, c'est un petit qui se débrouille bien*' (Ablaye, he is a young guy who has done well). Indeed, Ablaye convinced her sister to invest more in the food business, to turn her *gargote* into a decent restaurant in order to attract more clients. He supervised the purchase of a second-hand refrigerator and the construction of a small cement house with a wooden extension. The building was equipped with chairs and tables and decorated with colourful paintings. Ablaye also designed a larger menu with fixed prices to display his menu outside to potential customers. A couple of chairs and tables were arranged on the terrace. The first time I entered this restaurant, I was captivated by its cleanness and its friendly atmosphere. Not surprisingly, the new restaurant became quickly popular in Bougouni. Ablaye's business acumen uplifted Oumou's trade into a success story.

The turnover of the restaurant multiplied. As is the custom, Ablaye did not ask his older sister for anything; his attitude showed courage, patience and respect. While Oumou prepared food at home, Ablaye managed the restaurant every day. Helped by two female teenagers, he welcomed the clients, took their orders, served them, cashed their money, and cleaned the place. At the end of each day he gave the takings to Oumou. This situation lasted for a year. When Oumou was running her *gargote*, her earnings were just sufficient to handle her daily expenses. Thanks to the success of the restaurant, she bought new clothes for her

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<sup>241</sup> These small eating spots are commonly indicated by a woman standing behind a couple of cooking pots put on a table, and a bench where clients sit.

children, a building lot in town and a new motorbike (among other items). She also opened a bank account and saved money in it. Ablaye respected his older sister with whom he shared the same father and the same mother, but he was not happy that he did not receive anything from his daily work in the restaurant.<sup>242</sup>

Arguing he was the true '*promoteur*' (instigator) of its success, he confided to me: 'Without my help, her business would still be the same petty *gargote*!' He progressively lost patience; one day, he broke his silence and dared to ask Oumou to help him buying a second hand Jakarta motorbike. She sidestepped his demand. He insisted and they quarrelled over it for a month. Their relationship deteriorated. Then, Ablaye left the restaurant, a move he considered as a '*grève*' (strike). The drop in clientele was felt rapidly because Ablaye's charisma was part of the good reputation of the restaurant. The older brothers of Ablaye intervened and told him that, as her younger brother, he should not contradict his sister and should go back to work for her. His sister asked for an intervention by the oldest uncle of his family to settle their conflict. Her brother was sent to the old man who lectured him about the importance of birthright between generations in keeping the family united. He also warned him that young people should not show the way to their elders. Reflecting upon his situation and the traditional control of elders over the youth's resources, work and lifestyle in general, he told me:

'All these rules are linked to our environment. They are *inventeries* [laugh]. But without these *inventeries* the social life here would be difficult.'<sup>243</sup>

The French-African expression *inventeries* used here has a negative connotation. One way to explain it is to say that *invent.eries* comes from the French words *invention* (invention) and *connerie* (crap) that Ablaye uttered shortly after this sentence. He recognised the social importance of these rules which serve to prevent dissension within families, but he blamed the elders who abused them to the detriment of the emancipation of the youth; in this way, the path of the blessed child becomes mere *inventeries*. Ablaye did not contest the authority of his older sister *per se*; she was the patron because she financed the business. Nevertheless, as many young people I met, he just thought each effort must be rewarded. He did not accept that free work should be based on one-sided kinship ties any longer.

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<sup>242</sup> The terms 'brother' and 'sister' in Mali are not only used between biological siblings. For instance, *balimake* (brother) and *balimamuso* (sister) are polite expressions used for an acquaintance or a foreigner. In a way Malians cultivate a view of themselves as belonging to the same large family; everybody relate to everyone else as brothers and sisters. However, they do so with different degrees of closeness.

<sup>243</sup> *Toutes ces règles là, elles sont liées à notre environnement. Ce sont des inventeries. Mais sans ces inventeries la vie sociale seraient difficile ici.*

‘Someone who is more than 70 years old has no *avenir* [future]. Someone who is young has an *avenir* which needs the help of people to be built. I have seen so many talented older brothers upon whom our elders put pressure. They obeyed and now they are poor (...). These are traditional principles. If they hindered you, you should not follow them (...) Often people speak ill of someone who wants to move forward in life. But you will see that God will cause a stir; this person will succeed.’

Finally, Ablaye did not obey to his elders. He did not reconsider his decision because her older sister kept refusing his demand. Two month later, he moved to Bamako to work with a friend. Changes brought by the events of 1991 have demonstrated that Malians not only aspire to a better future, but also they can build a better future. However, many young people interpreted the moral framework of *hadamadenya* put forward by their elders during familial dissensions as a brake on the building of their lives. The next chapter explores the experience of adventure as an escape from the burden of traditional customs (*laada*) and as an opportunity for greater autonomy in Mali.

### ***Islam in the Mande world***

During the course of his researches on the oral epics of Mande blacksmiths, the art historian Patrick McNaughton found many references to Islam in Mande traditions. He wrote ‘this sort of eclectic interaction with Near Eastern religions occurs often in Mande traditions of all kinds, partly because Islam has been present for so long in the Western Sudan (...)’ (1995, 47). Similarly, the longstanding interaction between the Mande world and Islam is observed in the many Arabic linguistic borrowings found in *Bamanankan*. For instance, etymologically *hɔɔŋ* derives from the Arabic term *hurr*<sup>244</sup> (freeman), and *barika* originates from the Arabic term *baraka*. However, their meanings have come to differ from their Arabic sources over the centuries of contact between Islam and the Mande world.

To illustrate, the term *barika* in *Bamanankan* is linked to two registers, one of which does not relate to its Arabic source. In its religious sense, *barika* means ‘blessing’ and ‘favour’. This register reflects its Arabic source. However, in its mundane register *barika* is not linked to its Arabic source. In this case, *barika* means ‘physical strength’ and ‘vigour’. In this same register, *barika.ntan* designates the human being who is physically weak. By contrast, *barika.tigi* means

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<sup>244</sup> Or *hur*.

the human being who is physically strong. Following McNaughton the driving forces of the Mande world are 'the entangled issues of means and power' (1995, 51). Mande people perceive the state of things to be the result of visible (or mundane) and invisible (or occult) powers that men seek in order to succeed on earth. In this way, the double registers of the term *barika* might originate from the twofold nature of power present in the Mande world.

The anthropologist Roy F. Ellen rightly argued the difference between *adat* (custom) and Islam in southeast Asia highlights the existence of an unclear and thick boundary made of highly complex, intertwined, reinterpreted and reordered integrated elements of *adat* within Islam and vice versa. What is understood as Islamic practice by some people might be understood as the perfection of *adat* by other people of the same local community (see Ellen 1983). The same argument is made by Brenner concerning Muslim identities in Mali (1993a) and by Doquet concerning Islamic knowledge and non-Islamic knowledge in Mali (2007). Furthermore, Tamari showed most Islamic education in Mali is delivered in local languages and among individuals still engaged in what is interpreted as *Bamanaya* practices (1996). Following these scholars, my analysis of local social ethics (*hadamadenya*) embedded in the figures of the noble Muslim and the blessed child demonstrates that a sharp distinction between a sphere of custom (*laada*) and one of Islam is dubious. Islam is constitutive to a field of experience and not simply an order imposed upon experience. Instead of questioning the Islamic nature of a practice, the analyst should investigate the dynamics through which Islam is evoked.

In 2009 the Malian Assembly voted for a *Nouveau Code de la famille*. Muslim associations and some political parties organised demonstrations against it in most regional towns of Mali; they denounced a *Nouveau Code de la famille* which went against Islamic precepts. Eventually, the President refused to give his approval to the *Nouveau Code de la famille* and requested a revision from the Malian Assembly. The modified version of the *Nouveau Code de la famille* was eventually ratified in December 2011. Western media criticised the Islamist tone of the modified version of the *Nouveau Code de la famille* and deplored that the Malian Assembly ceded to conservative Muslim forces.<sup>245</sup> In parallel, Islamic media criticised the Western influences on the first version of the *Nouveau Code de la famille* and praised the ratified version as a victory for Islam.<sup>246</sup>

What I observed in Bougouni, however, differed from these media analyses. Many of my friends who demonstrated in Bougouni did so because they thought the *Nouveau Code de*

<sup>245</sup> <http://www.contrepoints.org/2012/01/27/66452-reforme-du-code-de-la-famille-au-mali-le-parlement-cede-aux-pressions-religieuses> ; <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20111205-mali-moins-droits-femmes-le-nouveau-code-famille> (retrieved the 27 March 2012).

<sup>246</sup> <http://islametinfo.com/2011/12/24/mali-femmes-le-nouveau-code-de-la-famille-regi-selon-les-preceptes-islamiques/> (retrieved the 27 March 2012).

*la famille* was against how they lived within their families. What outraged them was the fact that, instead of '*les femmes doivent obéissance au mari*'<sup>247</sup>, the *Nouveau Code de la famille* framed gender relation in term of '*mutuel respect*'.<sup>248</sup> Moreover, the *Code* extended the rights to inheritance to children born out of wedlock. According to a local teacher, Islamic associations recuperated this popular discontent, became its standard-bearers, and turned this grassroots claim for the legalisation of local customs into an Islamic agenda. Apart from the few intellectual Malian women I met, most Malians opposed this reform, but my Muslim friends did so with little reference to Islam. They instead told me they wanted to defend their '*dignité*' (dignity) as men and heads of family. The inhabitants of Bougouni demonstrated massively because they felt this reform scorned one of the bases of their traditions: patriarchal authority. With regard to the rights to inheritance for children born out of wedlock a woman jokingly pointed out to me: 'Men are involved in extra-marital relations. Then they are afraid that the child is not theirs. They do not want to recognise him. They wonder: "the child of the goat comes from which ram?"'. To her mind, what was at stake was to safeguard the longstanding local patriarchy, patrilineal society, and its codes of honour.

Western as well as Muslim media had islamised this popular claim in Mali, whereas most of the inhabitants of Bougouni criticised the first version of the *Nouveau Code de la famille* as irreconcilable with a way of life based on local norms and practices of social ethics, which are widely interpreted to be of Mande origin. The next analytical step would be to explore the complex processes through which the Mande legacy has tended to be transformed into a museum piece and Islam into the sole agent of social ethics in Mali.

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<sup>247</sup> Wife must obey her husband.

<sup>248</sup> Mutual respect.

## 4. Adventures

*'Ils sont venus en Gold Coast ou en Côte d'Ivoire pour chercher de l'argent sans doute, mais aussi pour chercher de l'aventure'* (Rouch 1967).<sup>249</sup>

The towns and roads of West Africa have been thronged since colonial times by migrants of rural origins in search of money. However, as the filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch commented in *Jaguar*, these migrants were also seeking adventures. Between 1910 to 1950 migrant peanut farmers (*nawétaans*) from the territory of French Sudan moved to the western region of Senegal during the rainy season. Some were sent by their families so as to earn money to pay colonial taxes<sup>250</sup> and bridewealth; others went of their own accord. Often these migrants were motivated by a spirit of adventure; they wanted to explore new horizons, to see new technologies, and to acquire new consumer objects (such as hats, sunglasses, jewellery, umbrellas, clothes) and the status and social distinctions they connoted (see David 1980, 113–126). 'The general message was that to prove their manhood, men had to go on adventure in Senegal' (Peterson 2011, 144). After 1950, young men from southern Mali went on adventures in Côte d'Ivoire for similar reasons (see Gary-Tounkara 2008). For the making of the documentary film *Moi un noir* (1957), for six months Jean Rouch followed the daily life of young inhabitants of Niger who migrated to the Treichville district of Abidjan in order to seek money. Fifty years ago on moving to Abidjan, these young men understood money as the main road to having a wife, house, car and successful urban life. But their little song 'Abidjan when we say your name, Abidjan of lagoon, nice sojourn', turned out to be a fleeting 'awakened dream' against the gloomy reality of daily struggles, tiredness and sadness (Ibid).

What can we say about migratory practices in contemporary Mali? An adventurous spirit persists, but the migrant does not need to go as far as the big cities of coastal countries anymore. Upper-market neighbourhoods, and hence money, can be found in the much smaller towns of landlocked countries, such as Bougouni. This chapter investigates the experience of adventure in the town of Bougouni through the *Bamanan* notion of *tunga*. Adventure starts on leaving home; it is a tortuous quest for a better life which unfolds in both meaningful and surprising ways. I explore the motives, stakes and encounters that underpin the broad context of adventure through the discourses of migrants of rural origins I met during my stay in Bougouni. I then describe what livelihood activities Bougouni offers to them in terms of small

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<sup>249</sup> They came to Gold Coast or to Côte d'Ivoire to look for money, but also to search for adventure.

<sup>250</sup> The first colonial tax was introduced in 1895. Taxes increased incrementally over the next several years (see Peterson 2011, 67).

trades, manual employment activities and schools. Throughout I look at the religious dimension of discussion.

*'If you give the key of Heaven to Muslims in the Mosque, they will not accept it and will try to run away through the windows, doors and roof (laugh). Because they think that in order to accede to Heaven, they should die first. They do not want to die (laugh).'*

The Importance of earthly ambitions is jokingly suggested above by my friend Ahmed, farmer and *bogolan* maker from rural southwest Mali, who moved to Bougouni a couple of years ago. Achieving a successful earthly path is an important element of Muslim life. Heaven is certainly a powerful part of their belief systems, but so incommensurable with our present times that most human beings would prefer to continue their time on earth rather than taking whatever shortcut to Heaven is offered. As stated in the introduction, Malian Muslims think God rewards and punishes Muslims already on earth. Moving forward in life, acquiring money, buying a motorbike, financing a wedding, building a house (...) are as important as the gates of Paradise to Muslim believers in Bougouni. Many rural Malians try to move forward in life through migration to urban areas; they respond to earthly ambitions by undertaking adventures. In the second part of the chapter, following an actor perspective I focus on the worldview of Muslim believers in order to understand where Muslim adventurers think they are heading to, how they perceive the unfolding of their life as in accordance with the will of God and, how far they believe they can influence the will of almighty God with respect to their life.

### ***Towards Bougouni***

I met Kassim in early 2009 inside the noisy and dusty atmosphere of a petrol-powered mechanic mill<sup>251</sup> in the Torakabougou district of Bougouni where he was a mill worker. During the course of my stay in the town we became friends, and Kassim revealed himself to be an alert observer of daily life in Bougouni. Later he opened a shop '*par-terre*'<sup>252</sup> in another district of Bougouni as a complementary night activity to his day work in the mill. By the end of my stay, Kassim additionally managed to run a cement-built shop selling and servicing mobile

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<sup>251</sup> Better-off urban households prefer to bring bags of crop to those modern mills which can pound their crop quickly in exchange of hundreds of francs.

<sup>252</sup> Shop '*par terre*' (street vendor) designates all outdoor rudimentary trades where products are displayed either on a table or on a plastic tarp/bag laid directly on the floor.



phones in Bougouni. By that time, his economic situation was improving, and a wedding project had hatched in his mind. The burgeoning success he was achieving by early 2010 had been preceded by years of struggle spent in adventures that he narrated to me one evening when he was fixing a mobile phone.

*'I grew up in a village in northern Côte d'Ivoire (...). Then, I moved to San Pedro in order seek money. I found a job as a docker in San Pedro harbour where I stayed for a couple of years (...). However I lost everything in the civil war. I could not return home with empty hands! Then I decided to go on adventure to Mali where there is nobody of my family. At that time Côte d'Ivoire was dangerous! From Bouaké to Zégoua our bus had to cross more than 30 roadblocks of the rebels. A policeman from the same town as me helped me to cross them safely (...). When in Sikasso, nobody helped me except someone who previously lived in Côte d'Ivoire. I told him my story. He then replied: 'You will suffer mate. It's harsh here.' Indeed I suffered. I slept outdoors for one month and I did not manage to eat properly. But the problem was where to store my only bag in a safe place during the day. I lied to touts by saying them I was expecting money from my big brother in order to go to Bamako. They kept my bag during four days. After that it was too much! I did the same trick with a street vendor sitting next to the coach station, but she started to refuse me after a couple of days. Then I moved out of the coach station and stayed a couple of days around a Mosque where I stored my bag and prayed regularly. Eventually someone noticed my comings and goings and then proposed me to work as gardener for his eldest brother. I accepted and lied by saying I had already done such a job in Abidjan (laugh). I was all-found and the wage was correct, but the patron did not give us enough food. After three months of watering, my co-worker convinced me to go to Bamako where job opportunities are better. Then we moved together in Bamako. However, Bamako turned out to be too harsh. The only work I found was as a carter (wɔɔɔɔɔɔɔɔɔɔ), but I did not accept it. It is too shameful and physical [laugh]. After a couple of weeks in Bamako, we moved to Ouéléssébougou to greet the eldest sister of my friend. I did not manage to find a job there either. Then we moved to Bougouni to greet a relative of my friend. Fortunately I met my Ivorian aunt<sup>253</sup> there. She helped me a lot. She found me a job as a houseboy and handyman in her younger brother's family in Bougouni' (Kassim, 35 years old, single).*

As a northern Ivorian, Kassim belongs to the broad Mande world which makes him culturally close to southern Malians. Kassim also speaks Dyula, a Mande language very similar to *Bamanankan*.<sup>254</sup> When he fled the Ivorian crisis, which badly hit the harbour of San Pedro, he went to southern Mali. From then on his story illustrates well how his life away from home has been characterised by its discontinuous trajectory, hardships and chance. Among all these difficulties, his Muslim devotion, regional identity and contacts helped him to connect with

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<sup>253</sup> Married older woman coming from the same area as he.

<sup>254</sup> Dyula is an important trade language of West Africa, spoken in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea by millions of people, either as a first or second language. The Dyula spoken in Côte d'Ivoire contains many French idioms.

locals, to survive, to find a job and to move forward on what Kassim calls '*tunga*' (adventure). The many settings of the journey he undertook (village – big town 1 – big towns 2 – Capital of Mali – big village – medium town) goes beyond strictly rural-urban migration; as he stated: 'I am an adventurer'.<sup>255</sup>

### ***Adventures***

During a bicycle trip to the village of Kokèlè near Bougouni, I come across a massive building erected among the typical rural habitations of mud houses with thatched roofs (see photographs 9 and 10 below).



This impressive house had been built by a local who had migrated to Gabon a couple of years ago. Income from farming system would not suffice for a Malian to build such a prestigious edifice, a fact which does not pass unnoticed in the village. When villagers see such ostentatious outcomes of adventure, the temptation to seek money elsewhere increases. Cement houses with several floors continue to provide a 'symbolic push factor' (see Riccio 2001; 2005) to villagers in rural Mali. However, the attractions of elsewhere are insufficient to explain the decision to leave home. One should also take into consideration the cultural constraints and possibilities of the local context in relation to the more distant context. As stressed by Riccio (2001, 2), people's access to political, social and economic resources in both

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<sup>255</sup> *Je suis un aventurier.*

regions<sup>256</sup> of destination and of origin are crucial to determine their decision to go on adventure.

The increasing disparity between remittances emanating from West and African countries has inclined African migrants to seek to move to the West rather than another African country. This migratory tendency toward Europe and the United States has allowed numerous Senegalese to invest in their country of origin, a fact that has considerably supported the urbanisation of Senegal for instance. In parallel, Schmitz speaks of a 'crisis of African migration' (2006, 97); political and economic deterioration in former African destinations (e.g. Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon) compelled migrants to head north. However we should notice that his study of transnational migration involves Senegal, a coastal country that has forged privileged networks with the Western world since the colonial period. By contrast, Mali is a landlocked country which suffers from remoteness and extreme poverty. While a Senegalese may depict his country as an economic blind alley, a Malian sees Dakar as a migratory destination. As illustrated by the *nawétaans* in Senegal and the economy of plantations in Côte d'Ivoire, patterns of migration within West Africa have tended to converge to coastal countries. Nonetheless, these patterns are influenced by national stabilities and wider environmental issues. In this regard, during the last two decades the desertification and demographic pressure hitting northern Mali coupled with the political instability in Côte d'Ivoire have transformed southern Mali into an important receiving area for West African migration (see chapter 1). I met many migrants of rural origin, like Kassim, who went on *tunga* in Bougouni so as to build a better life.

According to the Bamanankan-French dictionary compiled by Charles Bailleul (1996), '*tunga*' means 'foreign country'. However, my informants never used the idiom in this way. They often translated *tunga* into the French word '*aventure*' because they understood migration as a specific field of experience which goes beyond the simple fact of crossing boundaries; adventure encapsulates the unknown, uncertainty, novelty and hope of migration. For them, *tunga* starts as soon as you leave your home which is, however, an ambiguous concept (see Gugler 2002). In this peculiar case, home represents the familiar sphere, itself composed of ties (kin, friends and acquaintances), spaces (village(s) and lands) and traditions (custom, norms and roles). In this way, *tunga* emerges when you leave the village of origin in which you grew up and you face the unknown, through the uncertainty, novelty and hope of migration. *Tunga*, as lived experience, became meaningful in many ways for migrants of rural

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<sup>256</sup> By contrast to country, the term region emphasises the importance of local identities. Someone who moves to another region can be considered as foreigner by locals even if he/she is still in his country. In parallel, this person feels a stranger to this new social setting. I take the criterion of autochthony instead of citizenship as the meaningful difference that matters in context of adventure within West Africa.

origins I met in Bougouni. Their decision to go on adventure follows various motives I outline below.

The lack of arable land in relation to demographic pressure within rural families can provoke the decision to go on adventure, as is illustrated by Issa the shopkeeper. He grew up in a village near the town of Koutiala. Family members were numerous and, as a consequence, farming opportunities restricted. Feeling more of a *'bouche à nourrir'* (mouth to feed) than a contributor to his family, he decided to move to Bougouni to live next to a member of his village who had already settled in town. He started a shop *'par terre'* there. Rural men also move to towns also to help their families during *'les mois de suture'* (the difficult months before the new harvest when granaries are empty) by providing remittances. For Issa, *tunga* responded to village poverty and was lived in solidarity (*ɲɔɲɔn.dɛmɛ*) with his parents.

Others leave village life because of the weight of traditional customs (*laada*) such as gerontocracy. Ablaye was farmer in rural southwest Mali where 'the familial structure is based on lineage with pre-eminence of the patriarch *'gwatigi'* who manages the familial patrimony' (Konate 2003, 535).<sup>257</sup> He worked hard for his family. With other young men of his family, he was able to harvest promising quantity of cotton in early 2000. However his oldest paternal uncle, who is by custom also the family head and the treasurer of the *gwa* (extended family) he belongs to, disappointed him. After the death of his father, Ablaye answered directly to the head of the *gwa*. He had to give him all his harvest, but his uncle never rewarded him for his contribution to the family. Instead he kept the money for himself, travelled around south Mali and bought prestigious items for his own wife and children. Ablaye could see no future in face of such unfairness. After obtaining his DEF in the neighbourhood big village, Ablaye moved to Bougouni to pursue his studies at the IFM and to work in a local restaurant. Many young men see village life as a brake on building of their lives. *Tunga* is seen as an escape from the control of elders over youths' labour that allows them to take paid work.

*'What you find in your village, you have to give all to your parents. You cannot save money. What you find in Bougouni, you can save a bit and then you can start trading.'*<sup>258</sup>

Seibou, the laundry worker, decided to leave his family and his village located in south Mali near the Ivorian border because he wanted to save money so as to be able to start up trading. More precisely, when the grammatical particle indicating insistence *'yɛɛ'* follows a personal pronoun, such as in Seibou's sentence *'ɛ yɛɛ tɛ se ka yiriwa'* (you cannot save money), it

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<sup>257</sup> On the 'lineage logic' of West African rural societies, see Dozon (1996).

<sup>258</sup> *ɛ bɛ min sɔɔ village la, ɛ bɛ a di denbaya la. ɛ yɛɛ tɛ se ka yiriwa. ɛ bɛ min sɔɔ Buguni la, ɛ bɛ se a mara la ka jago ke.*

stresses the idea of individualism. Put differently, Seibou left his village in order to achieve more freedom, and autonomy from his family. Collective village life dominated by elders is seen as blind alley for realisation of the personal ambitions of the younger generation, many of whom opt for *tunga* in urban areas where customs are supposedly weaker, and money easier to be found. The town is judged as the setting par excellence of diversity, innovation, opportunity and freedom.

According to many Malians there are two ways of learning and becoming mature. The first one is by sitting on benches of classic school for years. The second one is by gaining experience through *tunga*. In a general manner, Malians say '*tunga kalanso de don*' (adventure is a school) and add, 'although you do not get money, you can find many things in it'. In this way 'travel leads to knowledge (...) which is essential to a young man's education (Ebin 1996, 98). Adventure widens horizons, connects people to a more sophisticated world, and opens their minds. This path to maturity is especially favoured by migrants of rural origin who left school prematurely because they had to take care of household chores, farming and their ageing parents.

Shiaka, the seller of tapes, left school after four years of *médersa*. He had to farm for his elders. Later, as a young man, he went on adventure to Côte d'Ivoire where he learnt basic French in the street and started to appreciate world music, such as reggae and rock n'roll. For him, those who were born, grew up and stayed in Bougouni, knew nothing and were ignorant. 'How can you write songs if you did not travel, if you did not experience things?' he added. Adventure is demanding and calls for maturity. More than concrete innovations, adventurers bring home prestigious knowledge and take pride in their past sojourns in the wider world. They consider themselves as '*évolués*' (civilised) compared to those who never travelled. In this way adventure is sometimes regarded as a *rite de passage* (Riccio 2001; Tacoli 2001) to maturity and manhood in southern Mali where most elders had travelled and worked in plantations in Côte d'Ivoire during their youth.

For other migrants, *tunga* shows them the value of work and the burden of social obligations coming from their home community. Sekou comes from a village located next to the town of Sikasso. He moved to Bougouni a couple of years ago. When I met him he worked as guardian for a local hotel. Back in his village he felt overwhelmed by what Malians call '*le social*'; a continuous flux of requests coming from his home community (kin, friends and neighbourhood). In his opinion this constant flux undermines the value of work and impinges on personal savings. This flux reduced drastically when he moved to Bougouni because he knows almost nobody there. He then realised how his home community affected his attitude toward work.

*'If you do not go on adventure, you do not know really what work means. You have to leave home in order to know the value of work and to find good causes making you move forward in life (...). If you are alone, you must work, you have to make your own way and to acquire experiences.'*

*Tunga* cuts off constraining social ties and demands the discipline to work. In this regard, migrants feel more able to accept degrading jobs to which they would not acquiesce in their home communities (see Riccio 2001). People may also move to town for its anonymity, where they avoid taxes and become part of what administrators call the '*population flottante*' (floating population).

*Tunga* is not exclusively male in Mali. Many rural young women move to Malian towns, either in order to help their groom finance their wedding, or to support their parents to acquire their trousseau (or both). Most of them work for upper-class families as housemaids (*baarakaloden musow*). Others simply opt for adventure in towns in order to escape forced marriages or to live a disapproved romantic love. Aicha arrived in Bougouni with her 'husband' a couple of months ago. She worked as a housemaid and, he worked as a labourer. They pretended to be married but they were not. They had fled their village near Segou in order to live their disapproved romantic love away from social pressures. As a laboratory of gender emancipation, the town offers also new opportunities to women away from the moralising eyes of their families and home community.

*Tunga* also involves risks and tensions. One of these is the tension between honour (*danbé*) and shame (*maloya*). The adventurer cannot return home with empty hands, as Kassim discusses.

*'I cannot come back home with empty hands. This is shameful. My parents, my brothers and my friends would be angry about that. If I come home and I see my friends married with kids, living in houses, driving cars and motorbikes... and me with nothing; I would be very angry and I would bring shame on my family. I need at least to start something here and to get married before returning home.'*

Adventure can transform Africans into 'heroes of modern times' as Rouch claimed (1967) in his documentary film *Jaguar* based on the migration of three men from Niger to the Gold Coast during the 1950s.<sup>259</sup> It is, however, a risky choice as well. The adventurer must achieve something.<sup>260</sup> He must show his parents and home community that he is able to improve

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<sup>259</sup> On ambivalent representation 'heroes or tricksters' see Riccio (2005).

<sup>260</sup> In contexts of transnational migration among young Soninke men in Kounda (*Région* of Kaye, Mali), a migrant aspires to '*realiser quelque chose*' (achieve something) in the village (see Jonsson 2008, 24).

himself by making a successful life and starting his own business. Adventurers should think 'in terms of "Walking on Two Legs" as [they] pursue urban alongside rural interests' (Gugler 2002, 31). Failure on the path of adventure is a constant source of anxiety for migrants who prefer to stay away for years than to return home with empty hands. One object embodies unsuccessful adventure in Mali: the '*tunga man jan*' bag (adventure did not go far away). It is a cheap, rectangular and thin plastic bag, usually decorated with kitsch drawings, found in all the markets of Mali. When an adventurer returns home with such bag, people are immediately suspicious that the contents of the bag may be worthless. The adventure did not work out for him. If he can afford only a cheap bag, then he must surely be poor. Successful adventurers should return home with prestigious items carried in ostentatious bags. The unsuccessful adventurer who goes back to farming in his village is usually labelled as cursed. Schmitz explains (2006, 109), in this context, the curse involves the migrant's reverting to a poor life, supported by traditional farming activities, as if the adventurer had moved but without moving forward in life.

Although migrants leave home in search of money and, in this way, momentarily escape the frame of village life, *tunga* does not recreate a custom-freedom dichotomy because the adventurer does not disjoin himself from his/her customs. With the prospect of return in mind, *tunga* is perceived as a circulatory movement which always comes back home; those who settle abroad never sever their origins completely. On the contrary, a successful migrant usually seeks to invest in his village of origin (such as building a cement house for his parents). The tension between honour and shame reminds migrants where they come from, and where they belong to. People say the 'advantages' (*nafa*) are with adventure. The narrative of autonomy coexists with the narrative of solidarity (see Riccio 2005, 115-116) because the migrant's personal success is primarily assessed by his community. In most cases, *tunga* is about gaining prestigious resources (experience, savings and materials) which bring migrants respect and esteem from their relatives, their village of origin and beyond. For the luckiest among them, adventure can bring them wealth and the status of '*mɔgɔba*' (big men) in their community. However, for many migrants *tunga* turns out to be a mixed experience; then they prefer to stay years abroad rather than undergoing the shame of an empty-handed return. Whereas people say 'advantages' (*nafa*) are with adventure, *tunga* is lived as a risky but transformative process which come close to the circulatory journeys (see Markovits, Pouchepadass, and Subrahmanyam 2003) and sojournings (see Amrith 2011) studied in a recent body of work on South Asia and Southeast Asia.

## ***Settling in Bougouni***

Making my weekly evening visit to my friend Boubacar (trader of *yuguyugu* in central market of Bougouni), his wife and his two young boys, I met two young men new to me sitting around the teapot and meal we typically shared together along with various jokes and discussions. One had arrived in Bougouni a couple of weeks earlier and worked now in the neighbouring gold mining site of Damanda. The other one's clothes were covered by reddish dust. He looked exhausted. At his feet lay a thin woodcut covered by cheap watches and sun glasses. He had walked all the day through the town in search of customers, but he managed to sell only two watches. Ibrahim, a teenager, had arrived yesterday from Mopti. He had left traditional Qur'anic school and came here to work as street peddler because, he argued, the market of Mopti was overcrowded of hawkers already. My friend Boubacar, a former Qur'anic school student, is from Mopti as well. Many traders in and around the central market of Bougouni are from the region of Mopti, via them, new faces from north Mali come to town.<sup>261</sup>

Most adventurers arrive in Bougouni through networks of friendship and kinship that help them to settle. Others, mostly men from rural south Mali, have heard of the growing reputation of Bougouni. Some villagers from neighbouring villages need to go to Bougouni because of its administrative position as head of *Cercle*. Others initially entered in the town in passing, due to its strategic position along the international tarred road between Bamako and Abidjan, but they eventually settled for various reasons.

An important minority of adventurers, especially among street peddlers and manual workers, are seasonal workers from the Malian countryside.<sup>262</sup> These young farmers move to town in search of supplementary money at the end of harvest. They try to work in town for six months, and then they return home for the farming season which also lasts roughly six months. After years of seasonal works, some decide to settle definitively in town. Adventurers struggle to make a living in Bougouni and face '*la conjoncture*' in many creative and imaginative ways (Toure 1985) that I classify in two low-income job categories (informal economy) and in one schooling category.

1. The first category of livelihood activities requires small investment, and covers any kind of independent small trade. It can be done either as a shop '*par terre*' (street-vendors,

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<sup>261</sup> In West Africa, contacts from Qur'anic school networks have supported migration patterns; on the case of Nigeria see Lubeck (1987).

<sup>262</sup> On the importance of labour migration in rural Mali, see Brock and Coulibaly (2000). However, villagers around big towns, such as Bamako, do not migrate to find money; they undertake a series of locally based commercial activities linked to the urban market (see Wooten 2005).



stallholders: see photograph 11 below on the left), or as a street peddler (see photograph 12 below on the right).



These shops '*par terre*' principally specialise in: petrol (*essencitigi*); medicines; cigarettes, sugar and tea bags (*cigaretitigi*); bread, eggs, coffee and Lipton<sup>263</sup> (*shefantigi*); *sucreries* (soft drink), traditional Malian dishes, *dibiterie* (butcher shop) (...). A few others sell shoes, clothes (*yuguyugu*, loincloth), music tapes, and DVDs. Others are specialised in fruits and brochettes or shoe shine and cobbling. There are also many street peddlers who offer a set of fantasy accessories made in Asia such as hats, bags, belts, sunglasses, cheap watches, cheap jewellery, radios, flashlights, scissors, cards, (...), toys (see above picture on the right). Rapid urbanisation in Mali during the 1990s coincided with an influx of cheap and mostly Asian made items, termed '*produits chinois*' (Chinese product) or '*pacotille*' (cheap junk) by Malians themselves. Sale of these goods boosted the uptake of small trade as a complement or alternative to farming for many Malians moving to urban areas (see chapter 5). Others sell religious items and sermon-cassettes; modern medicines and *bamanaya* medicines (...).

Veteran or better off adventurers, those who are able to invest a bit more money in business, sell more sophisticated and costly products such as mobile phone items and mobile credits, western-like cloths and modern supermarket products (...). Others offer sessions of video games. If successful, then migrants can move on to offer a wider range of similar products displayed in cement-built shops (see photographs 13 and 14 next page).

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<sup>263</sup> Malians differentiate what they call TEA used for the daily tea ritual from LIPTON; which is the black tea sold early in the morning and late in the night for keeping someone warm.



2. The second category of livelihood activities concerns all manual employment that involves no contract. Terms are oral, and the work agreement can be terminated at any time by either side. The fact of working for someone is often called '*mɔɔ baara bolo*' which literally means 'working in someone's hands'. This expression stresses the dependence the worker has on an employer; here money and work do not balance. The status of 'patron' (*mɔɔ.ba*, big man) demands respect and consideration on the part of the worker who is considered like a client. Many migrants work for upper-class family as housemaids and house boys. Female domestic servants do most household chores and nanny care, and male domestic servants help with farming and any other physical work such as fetching wood, carrying luggage and labouring. Such a domestic position is called '*baara.kalo.den*', 'the child who works on monthly basis'. A housemaid is usually underpaid and exploited by her host family.<sup>264</sup> Domestic servants can be made to work at anytime, and are usually the first to awaken and the last to go to bed. Some Malian friends defined the domestic servant as 'the slave of modern times' who is defenceless and subject to the arbitrary will of a patron. A friend in such situation told me 'a domestic servant works like donkey.'<sup>265</sup> The harsh regime imposed upon a donkey show that slavery, although ended, is still 'a powerful explanatory metaphor for describing unequal social relations' in present-day southern Mali (see Peterson 2011, 148-154).

Other migrants work as labourers in construction sites across the town. Bougouni offers various other urban employment opportunities, such as sales staff in shops, guardian for an administrative office or NGO, tout (*coxe*) in the coach station, worker in modern mill, sand-

<sup>264</sup> A housemaid is given room and board by the host family, but receives only 5,000 fcfa per month (£6-7).

<sup>265</sup> '*Baarakaloden be fali ka baara ke.*'

diver extractor,<sup>266</sup> petrol pump attendants, barmen in *maquis*, prostitutes (...). There are also those who sell their physical force such as the carters (*wɔtɔɔtigi*). They search for potential clients in the coach station and in the central market of Bougouni.

3. The third category is related to schooling: the minority of students who avoided dropout from school and obtained their DEF, can pursue their studies in Bougouni in one of the three high schools of the *Cercle* of Bougouni.<sup>267</sup> The town also hosts the IFM and a couple of technical schools which attract more than 2,000 students from all over Mali. Young men can also learn a craft in the sort of informal apprenticeship found in most workshops of Bougouni. Salif learnt the work of tailor by working for three years in the workshop of an established local tailor for instance. The positions in workshops found in Bougouni include bicycle mechanic, motorbike mechanic, car and truck mechanic, baker, mobile mechanic, tailor, haircutter, driver, carpenter, welder, builder and electrician.

### ***Destiny and the quest for a better life***

Many studies have demonstrated the importance of networks in the construction of migrant careers, as illustrated by Senegalese (Riccio 2001; 2005; Schmitz 2006) and West African people in general (Schmitz 2008) moving to Europe. Well-established Soninke migrant networks in France have significantly supported transnational migration as the main path to adulthood for young Soninke men from northwest Mali during most part of the postcolonial period (see Manchuelle 1989; 1997; Jonsson 2008). Contacts are also crucial to the integration of adventurers in Bougouni into this new urban environment. However, in contexts of poor (or absent) established networks, adventurers seek contacts through different strategies. Following an actor-based approach, I propose to enter into the worldview of Muslim believers in order to understand where Muslim adventurers are heading to, how they perceive the unfolding of their life as the will of God and, to what extent they can influence the almighty will of God upon their life. Although adventure is not a religiously motivated travel (like the pilgrimage to Mecca, or migration due to religious segregation (*hijra*), or visit to shrines, or travel in search of knowledge (*rihla*))<sup>268</sup>, Muslim believers perceive it as being in the hands of God.

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<sup>266</sup> *Mɔɔɔ min bɛ ka tchen-tchen bɔ.*

<sup>267</sup> One public high school and two private high schools.

<sup>268</sup> On religiously motivated travel in Islam, see Eickelmann and Piscatori (1990, 5-6).

When they leave the village of origin in which they grew up, adventurers face the unknown, through hardship, novelty and hope<sup>269</sup> of migration. In such contexts of uncertainty, only the certainty of God accompanies the believer along the tortuous path of *tunga*. This certainty which guides the believer along the tortuous path of *tunga*, is not associated only with fatalism. On the contrary, certainty about God gives rise to religious sentiments which set the adventurer in motion in many ways that I explore below. My analysis then aims to explore Muslim adventurers' quests towards better lives through the study of their cosmologies of migration based on local perception of destiny (*dakan*) and its causes (*sababu*).<sup>270</sup>

Destiny (*dakan*) is a common topic of daily life in conversation, and in the local film and music industry.<sup>271</sup> For Malian Muslims, destiny is not only an idea or a belief; it is an important component of Muslim faith. Focusing on the connection between practices and religiosity (see Asad 2001, 217–220), I explore how the notion of destiny is embodied in Muslim life in Mali. As a preliminary remark, my informants' practical understanding of destiny was connected to three principle themes I discuss below. Muslims perceive the work of destiny in their daily life within contexts in which they find themselves. These themes are therefore not exclusive; there are just simultaneously available and ready to use in any specific situation for Muslims who find them meaningful at any precise moment of their life.

The first theme is the almighty will of God that Malian Muslims refer to when they say '*Ala ka bon*' (God is The greatest) or '*Ala ye a latige*' (This is the will of God). It explains the inevitability of most sudden misfortunes in Mali, such as car accidents for instance. One day I was arguing with touts in the coach station of Sikasso. Because of a system of rotation that distributes clients among coach companies, they wanted me to buy a ticket for an old bus that was about to leave. I instead wished to take a later one which looked newer. Listening to our debate, a passenger then told me: 'Old or new, a bus is a bus. It does not matter. Engine is good. God, and not the bus, decides whether you will reach your destination or not.' Death is the fact of God par excellence. Usually nobody asks for the intervention of justice in lethal car accidents because responsibility for such deaths dwells beyond human beings. Malian Muslims can also refer to the almighty will of God in public debate as a means to avoid being connected with a shameful situation, or to disengage themselves from responsibility for a misfortune (e.g. disappearance of money, or livestock). Others simply mention God as a statement of ignorance. As Lamine the local entrepreneur argues: 'When Muslims say "God has decided it",

<sup>269</sup> To gain money and to build a better life.

<sup>270</sup> Inspired by Sahlins' usage of cosmologies, I am interested in how adventurers incorporate the experience of uncertainty and indeterminacy into their existence and ideas of religiosity (see 1994, 414-415).

<sup>271</sup> In her song called *dakan* Nahawa Doumbia explains the omnipresence of destiny in people's life and the importance of searching for God's protection on earth.

here exactly ends personal reflection.’ The almighty will of God reminds them of the limits of human being and the presence of God on earth.

The second theme is kinship. As formulated by one of my research assistants, ‘*wolola yé dakan yé*’ (birth is destiny) because ‘you do not choose your legacy, your parents, your brothers and sisters, your town and your country’. This second theme is linked to a ‘personality theory’ based on the impact of parents and ancestors upon individual destiny (see Horton 1961). It focuses on the fact that, through birth, a Malian Muslim belongs to a specific descent group which imprints on its members a peculiar legacy (or life momentum). This aspect of destiny is relevant for the exploration of the transmission of *barika* between generations of Muslim *marabouts* for instance. It also partially explains the figures of the blessed child (*dubabu/barika den*) and the cursed child (*danga den*), I explored in the previous chapter, which frame the traditional sense of Muslim personhood in *Bamanan* regions of Mali.

The third theme, and focus of this sub-chapter, is human responsibility. In this dimension, the destiny of human life is in the hand of God, but God lets human beings select among various paths. Each path is set in motion by specific causes that a human being has to seek, find and perform. This theme involves a conception of the future which is expressed through the local notion of *sababu*.<sup>272</sup> This term primarily means ‘cause’, but it also signifies origin, reason and secret (see Bailleul 1996). In lay settings, *sababu* refers to ‘a cause and effect way of thinking’ proper to human rationality. In religious settings, *sababu* becomes more complex, concealed and moral.

Muslims in Mali often said that ‘tomorrow is in God’s hand’ (*Sini be Ala bolo*) because only God knows the exact unfolding of someone’s future on earth; therefore someone’s *sababu* is secret and hidden to himself. Nevertheless, Muslims can uncover their future by discovering its signs. In this regard, Muslims need to find the cause, origin, and reason of paths shaping their destiny. Someone’s earthly life develops along a chain of causes and their effects; while a human being is responsible for the causes inherent in his life, God is responsible for their effects. To simplify, Muslims told me that God has reserved to each person two earthly paths: a good one, and a bad one. The first is linked to *sababu juman* (good cause). The second one is linked to *sababu juguman* (bad cause). Each Muslim can choose which one to unfold. This is where human responsibility enters into action through the question of the choice of destiny. If you act correctly, God will bless and help you to find your *sababu juman*, allowing you to achieve success within society. On the other hand, if you do not act correctly, God will not help you to find your *sababu juman*. God might even curse you. In this way, you

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<sup>272</sup> Sabab (Ar.).

will find only your *sababu juguman* made of misery and suffering in your life on earth. Hell will probably be your fate after death. For Malian Muslims, God acts upon someone's life through a system of rewards and punishments stemming from that person's behaviour on earth.<sup>273</sup>

Bougouni has to be understood as a site full of everyday experiences of *sababu juman* and *sababu juguman* which determine the ups and downs of an adventurer in quest of a better life. This notion of destiny stresses that the promise of piety starts tomorrow and not only in the 'Hereafter' (see Schielke 2009a). Practice of piety is not only motivated by 'the fear of hell' (Ibid), but also by the attraction of God's favour on an earthly path. Here destiny involves a sort of divine justice related to the way Muslims seek their *sababu* on earth. Before the Hereafter, the stake of a Muslim life is about success in this life.

The actions taken in seeking *sababu* depend on how the society defines earthly success. The life story of Salif the tailor exemplifies what seeking *sababu* signifies for most Muslim adventurers of rural origins I met in Bougouni. After a typical rural childhood in south Mali, Salif's father sent him to traditional Qur'anic school in Segou where he spent nine years of his life. After these difficult years abroad during which his father passed away, he went back to his village and settled next to his mother and his big brother. However, unmarried and under the close authority of his elders, Salif could not build his life in his own way there. After one season of farming, he left his village in order 'to seek his *sababu*' (*ne ka sababu jini*). This move was about 'finding a position within society' (*ka position sɔɔ*). Comparing himself with his big brother settled in the village, he argued that his big brother - married, a father, head of family and cattle trader - had already found a position within society. But he, as 'unmarried' (*ceɣana*) and still dependent of his family, had not yet achieved any respectable position within his society. For most men from the countryside, seeking *sababu* is about finding a respectable position within their society. It concretely means 'getting married' (*ka muso furu*), 'having children' (*ka denw sɔɔ*), 'taking care of the family' (*ka nasɔngɔ di*), and 'building a house' (*ka so jo*).<sup>274</sup> Because such plans cannot be realised without money, seeking *sababu* involves seeking 'money' (*wari*). Thus, Salif moved to Bougouni and learnt the profession of tailor in order to gain the money necessary for moving forward in his life. According to Salif, the fact of moving to Bougouni belongs to the destiny he picked when seeking his own *sababu*.

How does someone find his *sababu*? What do piety and Islamic ethics mean in this context? During my stay in Mali, I became curious about the designs painted on big trucks

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<sup>273</sup> In the system of rewards, a successful life on earth and access to Heaven are connected. In this analysis, I focus on earthly achievement.

<sup>274</sup> Despite increasing material consumptions which has brought distinctions into village life, we can say that 'maidens, meal and money' are still the key elements of success in rural Mali (Meillassoux 1981).

passing by Bougouni and the public green vans called *sotrama*<sup>275</sup> or *duuru-duuruni*<sup>276</sup> which are mushrooming in Bamako. Several times I saw '*sababu man nɔɔ*' painted in white at the back of such vehicles in Bamako. Literally, this expression is translated as '[finding] the cause is not easy', but it locally signifies that 'moving forward in life is not easy'. Indeed working in the public transport business in overcrowded and polluted Bamako is tiring, dangerous and not well paid. When I asked my friends how someone can find his *sababu*, they all referred to hardship and the culture of work.

For Shiaka the seller of tapes, 'if you only sit, how can you gain *sababu*?' Another friend replied by pointing to the big can of water next to him and told me: '*Sababu* is in God's hand. Look at the big can. If you push this heavy can, God will help you. But if do not push it, God will not help you'. Referring to lazy people who spend their days in sitting, and gossiping while drinking tea in *grin*, Fousseini the carter said, 'If you do not sit and you stand up and go looking for job, and accept a difficult job, God will give you a hand'. Then he added '*Ala yé mɔɔɔ jigin yé. Baara o yé i fa an i ba yé*' (God created human being, and work is his mother and his father). For most Malian Muslims, seeking *sababu* is about standing up, being active and 'working' (*baara*) by contrast to just sitting, waiting and being passive. However, more than working, seeking *sababu numan* is about working hard. The importance of being a hard worker is jokingly suggested below by my friend Ahmed.

*'If you hold the tail of the lion and you ask for help, nobody will come. However, if you hold the head of the lion and you ask for help, people will come and will help you to bind and immobilise the lion.'*

Muslims believe that sooner or later a hard worker will receive help from God in his life. However, the hard worker should not expect anything from God quickly. On the contrary, a good Muslim, the one who is seeking *sababu numan*, should always act with patience and acceptance.<sup>277</sup> These disciplinary aspects of Islamic ethics are well illustrated below in a conversational anecdote collected during one of many evening chats I had with Kassim.

Kassim was listening to Islamic radio programmes. Sharing the thoughts of Muslims who are sceptical about the sincerity of public Islam (see chapter 2), Kassim started commenting on the preaching of a famous Malian Islamic scholar broadcast on the local radio

<sup>275</sup> SO-TRA-MA: Société de Transport Malienne.

<sup>276</sup> *Duuru-duuruni* literally means 25 francs which refers to the price of the first public transport in Bamako during early postcolonial period. The contemporary *duuru-duuruni* is the *sotrama*, the usually worn-out green van with wooden bench at the back. It is the cheapest public transport in Bamako (150francs).

<sup>277</sup> On similar understanding of Islamic ethics in terms of 'the virtue of patience and endurance' among youth Moroccan in context of social inequality and social abandonment, see the case of Jawad in Pandolfo (2007, 340-341).

Bediana: addressing the hypocritical aspect of Muslim life in Mali, Haïdara<sup>278</sup> was pointing out that a correct attitude in life is more important than regular praying in the making of a good Muslim. Kassim agreed and added a couple of sentences which summarise an aspect of the Muslim faith based on a work ethos that I noticed among Muslim adventurers in Bougouni.

*'Certain people pray and ask God for 100,000fcfa at the end of the month. If they do not obtain this amount, they stop - Affaire de Dieu<sup>279</sup> -. Praying is not that! Look at your bicycle. If you feel confident that your bicycle can bring you to Bamako, whatever the cost, you will get it. If you feel already discouraged and you do not trust your Chinese bicycle (...), you will never reach it. You should never expect something from praying. You should trust God. This is it. Sooner or later, God will help you; God will thank you.'*

Putting differently, 'regular praying is important, but it does not put food on your plate' argued Ablaye. The lazy Muslim who sits all day and just stands up for taking ablution and praying and fasting during the holy month of Ramadan will not find *sababu numan* in his life. By contrast, the patient and courageous Muslim who works hard and takes actions in life, this one pleases God. Such a way of living destiny shapes perception of Muslim piety as a work ethos, a means to salvation which is also observed elsewhere, such as among members of Mouride Sufi brotherhood (Ebin 1996) and resonates also with the famous book of Weber on the protestant ethic and predestination (2002). Here the certainty of God goes beyond the notion of belief as an intellectual reality. It becomes embodied in religious sentiments which give courage, patience, and motivation to Muslim adventurers in their quest for a better life. Most Malian Muslims stipulate that 'working is worshipping' (*baara yé bato yé*). These ideas of Islamic ethics as a practice of work ethos which involves a discipline of patience and courage are not new in Mali. They originate from a longstanding conversation between an Islamic dogma of God-almighty with local senses of justice and wisdom about hardships found in the journey towards *sababu*, such as expressed in numerous *Bamanan* proverbs (*zana*) and thoughts.

*'If you manage to hold your calabash up to your ankle, God will help you to raise it up on your head.'*<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> On Cherif Ousmane Madane Haïdara, see chapter 2 and 6.

<sup>279</sup> God's business.

<sup>280</sup> *Ni ɛ yé daga ta ka se i senkuru ma, Ala be i deme ka a sigi kun ma* (*Bamanan* proverb).



### ***The economy of charity***

Another important practical dimension of *sababu* is networking. Turning points in people's life are often of a social nature: these encounters, when they are deciphered through Muslim faith, are not random events. They become divine interventions in people's life.

In August 2009 I travelled with my friend Ahmed to the weekly market of the village of Siramana located 30 kilometres south of Bougouni within the *Commune Rurale* of Kologo. After several purchases, we decided to return to a neighbouring village where Ahmed lives. But when we were about to leave, it suddenly started to rain heavily. We ran to shelter in a nearby mud house. We then realised we were not alone in this refuge that was already crowded with people who had come here for the same reason as us. After finding somewhere to sit and greeting each other, a dozen or so people started to talk and to exchange ideas, advice and contacts. Ahmed was debating with two young men over the meaning of praying in the Mosque. While they were arguing for the importance of *baraji* (God's award as access to Heaven), he was rather inviting them to look at the Mosque as a meeting point where news and knowledge circulate, and solidarity is created. In another corner of the room, a Fula was giving the recipe for a *Bamanan* medicine against backache and kidney ache to a farmer who complained that his wife was suffering from severe pain. Other people were preparing the usual tea that accompanies talk in Mali (...). These fruitful exchanges continued until the end of the rain (and even longer for certain). Before departing, the Fula entertained the crowd by pointing that: 'Thanks to God who made us to meet up together today. Rain came. We could not go. Each of us took refuge here [laugh of approval from the crowd].'

For most people present in the shelter, the fact of coming together here was God's will which manifested itself through sudden heavy rain. Within the worldview of the Muslim believer, encounter is not a random product, but a fact of God. In this way, Malians state '*sababu* is putting people together' (*Sababu yé mɔɔɔ ɲɔɔgon yé*) because most Muslims understand social encounter as another sphere of intervention of God.

I want to emphasise here the fact that biographies of adventurers frequently develop along social encounters. Members of an established network (kins, friends) can provide shelter and food to the newcomer in town, but further networking is crucial for the adventurer wanting to move forward in life. Access to livelihood for migrants mostly depends on patronage in towns characterised by high unemployment and an informal economy dominated by members of local elite who are able to finance workers. Moving forward in life is assisted by networking here, as elsewhere in Africa where personal links take precedence over

institutional links in most daily affairs (see Chabal and Daloz 1999). More than resources themselves, what is crucial is the 'access' to them (see Owuor and Foeken 2006). In such circumstances, seeking *sababu* is therefore about searching to be connected with people who can help you to move forward in life. It involves integration within a specific moral economy characterised by clientelism and patronage. My analysis is deepened below through the ethnography of Kassim who managed to start small business in Bougouni thanks to the patronage of a local state administrator.

Kassim settled in Bougouni three years ago thanks to the help of his '*Ivorian aunt*', a married older woman coming from the same area as him, who found him jobs as houseboy, lumberjack, farmer and handyman for various better-off families. Although they provided him room and board, his monthly wage of 5,000 fcfa did not allow him to save money; he remembered this period as harsh and shameful: 'When I came back home from the field I was so dirty. The daughters of my patron looked at me as if I was not a man [laugh]'. After one year of work as house boy, Kassim eventually found a job in a petrol-powered mechanical mill in Bougouni thanks to a neighbour who put him in contact with the owner of this mill. I met him when he had been working there for more than two years. He earned a monthly wage of 20,000 fcfa. At that time he rented a single room within a familial compound and paid his food contribution to the family settled next to him. Although single, the difficulty posed by such a wage level is how to cover daily life expenses and still save money towards a small trade project. The little amount of money someone manages to save is usually put towards the purchase of prestigious items (e.g. mobile phone), health care and what young Malian men called '*l'amour commercial*' (commercial love)<sup>281</sup>, if it is not already 'eaten' by numerous requests arising from the neighbourhood (what Malians call '*le social*'). Kassim worked from morning to late afternoon in the mill, but his hard labour did not allow him to make any considerable savings. He wanted to move forward in life, but how? After reflection, he decided to make some extra cash by selling cigarettes, sugar, chewing gum (*cigaretitigi*) and coffee, tea and eggs sandwiches (*shéfantigi*) in the evening. To do so, he needed roughly 30,000fcfa as basic investment (for the required furniture). He therefore embarked upon various strategies with the aim of reaching his ambition.

Although he was not satisfied by his wage in the mill, he kept working hard and was hoping for a generous gesture from his patron. He was a faithful worker who stayed loyal to his boss when other workers left; he also trained other co-workers of the mill. In order to

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<sup>281</sup> Love affairs in Bougouni were important means through which women granted sex to men in exchange of prestigious items (e.g. expensive cloths, mobile phone) and money; on love relations in urban Mali, see Schulz (2002, 809-810).

counteract the eroding effect of '*le social*' over his income, he also joined a *tontine*<sup>282</sup> under cover of a woman friend. He was investing 5,000 fcfa every month in this tontine hoping his round would come soon. Kassim also visited various local experts in occult sciences so as to improve his luck (*garijegε*), and local saints in order to receive their blessings and to secure God's favour over his fate. However time was passing and his previous strategies had not succeeded. Then, he activated what I call "economy of charity" by asking for financial help (loan or gift) from wealthy friends such as Yaya, a powerful local state administrator he met in his workplace.

The key to this strategy is to become the protégé (sort of client) of a patron. Within a poor job market and economic scarcity, patrons are the gatekeepers of the informal economy who can provide the necessary cash for starting small trades. They can also hire someone for various chores, or recommend someone to other patrons. Their precious help take numerous forms; one among them belongs to the realm of Islamic charity of the Muslim patron.

But in this peculiar case, the patron-protégé relationship is not based on 'business venture' such as studied by Warms among wahhabi merchants of Sikasso in which 'protégés work for a continual flow of goods and credit which give them the opportunity to make profits themselves' (1994, 118) and in similar ways by Gregoire among Hausa merchants in Niger (1992). Although the patronage I investigate is also the outcome of a slow process through which someone gains 'a reputation for seriousness' (*mɔgɔ sebe*), it is not primarily based on 'successful repayment of small debts and devotion to religion' (Warms 1994, 109). Here the patron-protégé relationship is the result of social bond characterised by asymmetric friendship and submissive conduct in which the protégé slowly manages to be considered as a '*mɔgɔ sebe*'. *Sebe* signifies reliability in general. In community life, *sebe* defines the polite one who shows respect to his elders. Given a poor job market and economic scarcity, *sebe* can also stress the qualities of hardwork, loyalty and submission. Whereas a patron-protégé relationship among traders aims at mutual prosperity, here it brings access to a livelihood activity for the protégé and reinforces the prestige and status of the 'patron' as a good Muslim and big man (*mɔgɔ.ba*) through an economy of charity I develop below.

The owner of the mechanised mill in which Kassim worked was a close friend of Yaya. Almost every day Yaya spent lunch time and late afternoon on the threshold of the mill where its owner hosted a *grin*. There Yaya met Kassim. Since their first meeting, Kassim had greeted him with politeness and respect by shaking hands while looking down. Each time Yaya arrived

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<sup>282</sup> Tontine is the traditional women's banking system of Mali. On a regular basis, each member of the group chips in a fixed amount of money. The total sum is then given to one woman chosen according to a circulatory process. In this way, each member of the association benefits successively from a considerable amount of money at once. This system provides savings to women. It helps them to face unexpected or specific expenses.

in this *grin*, Kassim came out of the mill, greeted Yaya, offered him the best seat, and returned to work within the mill. Sometimes he sat behind Yaya and prepared the tea for the members of the *grin*. The cup of tea circulated first between the patron and his friends, and then it completed the round between the workers. When Yaya engaged Kassim in conversation, Kassim never interrupted and listened to him carefully. When Yaya ate at the mill and invited Kassim to join him, he always found an excuse to eat after Yaya. If Yaya needed something, Kassim went on an errand for him (...). In this way they became acquainted, and developed an asymmetric friendship in which Yaya progressively started to perceive Kassim as someone reliable.

In parallel, Yaya was not just anyone in Bougouni; he was a powerful local state administrator who earned a considerable amount of money and had contacts with influential members of the local elite. Although already responsible for his parents and siblings, in one year, Yaya managed to build a cement house, to buy a laptop, a new Jakarta motorbike and several building plots in Bougouni (among other minor prestigious items). As a Muslim believer, Yaya prayed regularly, fasted during the holy month of *Ramadan*, and listened to public Islamic sermons organised in town during the evening. In addition, as a successful Muslim he felt morally affected by what happened around him. Reflecting upon his privileged position in town, he once stated: ‘the value of man is to learn a profession, to find a job, to earn money and to feel pity for others.’

Owing to his status of patron within the local community, Yaya received a flux of requests coming from kin, friends and the neighbourhood within context of increasing economic inequality.<sup>283</sup> In turn, he had to deal with what Malians called ‘*hine*’ which means ‘pity’ and ‘compassion’. *Hine* is an important element of the local sense of humanism that I introduced in the previous chapter (see *hadamadenya*). It emphasises ‘solidarity’ (*ɲɔɡɔɲ.dɛmɛ*) between the members of the local community. *Hine* is also regarded as a virtuous sentiment that local Muslim scholars relate to the third Islamic pillar (*zakat*/alms, charity). Therefore, *hine* shapes local conceptions of a good Muslim as well as of ‘*mɔɡɔba*’ in Mali. Yaya needed, however, to manage his resources and to be selective whom to support. If Yaya refused all demands, people of the local community might label him a ‘selfish’ person (*ɲɛɡoya*) and ‘cursed child’ (*danga den*). On the other hand, he could not reply positively to all of them if he wanted to consider his own interest as well. As a patron, he needed to balance the pursuit of his own interest with those of his kin, friends and the interests of the neighbourhood and local community. In a system of clientelism and patronage characterised by the continual search for

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<sup>283</sup> In this situation ‘le social’ can lead to an ‘economy of affection’ in which demands arising from a state agent’s ties to society generate ‘corruption’ (see Villalón 1995, 91).

mutual help and a 'win-win' situation (Bayart 1989; Bayart, Mbembe, and Toulabor 1992), I argue, the charity of Muslim patrons is more oriented towards those they consider as 'reliable men' (*mɔɔɔ sebe*) than to the community as a whole. Here we can say that 'pragmatic instrumentalism and pious sincerity' coexist within the same person (Osella and Osella 2009, 216).

Trust based on religious identity works for those in a minority situation as a marker and maker of a network. During the nineteenth century Muslim trade networks operated in just such way in non-Muslim West Africa (see Amselle 1977; Launay 1992). However, unless you belong to a specific Muslim movement characterised by a sharp boundary and group solidarity, Muslim identity in the increasingly Muslim society of Mali is not a guarantee of reliability anymore.<sup>284</sup> In this regard, the wahhabi identity is now an important criterion of commercial reliability for those who wish to integrate into the established network of wahhabi traders in contemporary Sikasso (see Warms 1992). Nonetheless, to the eyes of ordinary Muslims, the facts of praying and fasting publicly connote Muslim identity, but they are not sufficient to make you a reliable and trusted person. What then differentiates a 'reliable person' (*mɔɔɔ sebe*) from the anonymous masses for ordinary Muslims in Bougouni?

*Mɔɔɔ sebe* signifies the courageous and patient hard worker who shows gratitude, etiquette and respect to a patron. All these submissive conducts symbolically determine who is the reliable powerless party and who is the prestigious patron; they define who gives and who takes in the economy of charity. In terms of this asymmetric friendship, and in resonance with local conception of humanism and Islamic charity, a Muslim patron feels obliged to make small gifts and gestures of *hine* to a powerless but reliable person. In turn, the beneficiary of such patronage praises (*ka mɔɔɔ tɔɔɔ fo*) his benefactor as a big man (*mɔɔɔba*), and might be available to serve him further by rendering multiple services in the future. This economy of charity not only tends to reproduce an ethos of submissive attitudes embodied in the docile migrant searching for livelihood strategies in Bougouni, but also legitimates status, prestige and social inequalities in town. Over time, if successful, this economy of charity can develop the patron-protégé relationship into a business venture.

During one of our numerous meals taken together in his familial compound, Yaya expressed how Kassim aroused his *hine*: 'Kassim is really courageous! He is a hard worker and he respects me too much! I feel pity for him (*hine*).' In spite of his constant efforts, Kassim was not moving forward in life. His projects stagnated. In this sense, pity (*hine*) was not a response to human misery, but the fact of being affected by the courage and the respect of the

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<sup>284</sup> Furthermore, public concern about hypocrisy demonstrated in chapter 2 undermines the credibility of public norms of piety as criteria of trust.

powerless. Indeed adventurers stressed the fact of facing hardship and economic stagnation with a patient and hard working attitude. As Shiaka the seller of tapes explains: '*Sababu* is the fact of meeting people who feel pity for you because, although you work hard and you gain your life through the sweat of the brow, you do not move forward in life'. For adventurers in Bougouni, networks are not pre-existent established structures; they instead come into being because they strategically wait for patronage to turn up in an active way. Eventually, Yaya helped Kassim financially who therefore managed to start his small evening trade.

In a society characterised by weak institutional and bureaucratic bonds, a scarce job market, clientelism and patronage, charity becomes an important means of access to livelihood activities for adventurers. Stories of financial help from a better-off person to what Malians call *mogɔ sebe* are numerous in contemporary Mali. They explained most advancement of personal ambitions among adventurers I met in Bougouni. In addition, such charity participates in the reproduction of social hierarchy through bodily and theatrical practices of deference, prestige and respect. Gestures of mercy and Islamic charity pertain to the reproduction of praise, status and leadership in Mali and beyond.

### ***God-almighty, Muslim faith and religious experiences***

Riccio's informant says: 'the migrant does not have a precise global project; he is an adventurer... only the signs of success can be aimed at as a general goal' (2005, 105). Indeed, Muslims who leave home know the social expectations placed on their shoulders, but the rest is in the hands of God. They are adventurers. *Tunga* is therefore apprehended as a path towards wealth, as a school, and a *rite de passage* in which shame and honour are at stake, but thereafter lived as a transformative process with unknown consequences. Instead of being the product of a 'prescribed faith', Muslim faith is questioned and reconstituted along the journey and struggle towards a better life (Marsden 2009, 60). In order to move forward on its tortuous path, Muslim believers deploy many strategies which aim at attracting God's favour on their fate.

By studying Muslim faith in relation to earthly ambitions and destiny, I invite investigation of new ways of 'moving closer to God' (Schulz 2003, 23) that are motivated by the building of a successful life in its mundane sense. In this way, Muslim adventurers demonstrated a religious commitment in which 'working is worshipping'. The meaning of a

Muslim life spent on adventures became embodied in a work ethos and in virtuous disciplines of patience and courage. In comparison to Schielke's analysis of the Salafi piety movements in Egypt (2009b), the search for *sababu* among ordinary Muslims in Bougouni does not necessarily result in the slogan 'Islam is the solution' as an uncritical reality. It instead highlights primarily the existence of 'God-almighty' as a bottom line for ordinary Muslims in Mali. What does it mean? Here, 'religion as paradigm' does not reduce to an Islamic scriptural solution put into practice in the shape of a project of self-formation. From a phenomenological perspective (see Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 91-92), the 'lifeworld' of Muslim believers comes into being through their relationship to God. In parallel with its orthodoxy, Muslim life is also understood as a complex, concealed and moral path that heads towards self-realisation and that lies in the hands of God. If we associate piety with 'relationship to God' most Muslims would certainly acknowledge the importance of having an unmediated relationship to God. However in reality, it is an ideal lived by Muslims through the intermediaries of the ups and downs of everyday life. Therefore, for most ordinary Muslims, Islamic faith as religious experience is lived as much as a tortuous path to explore, as it is the practice of a prescribed solution ready to use.

## 5. Consumption, distinction and the occult.

The contemporary infrastructure of Mali has been shaped by various foreign investors who have built monuments, roads and bridges throughout the country. The three costly bridges crossing the river Niger in the capital Bamako illustrate the history of successive foreign influences in Malian soil.

The first bridge, *Le Pont de Badalabougou* (in reference to the Badalabougou district of Bamako), was opened under French colonial rule in 1957. In the aftermath of the bloody events of March 1991, it was renamed *Le Pont des Martyrs* (Martyrs Bridge) as a tribute to the demonstrators who sacrificed their life for the struggle to democracy and freedom in Mali.

The second bridge, *Le Pont du Roi Fahd* (King Fahd Bridge), was erected in 1982 and financed by the Saudi Fund for Development. With the independence of Mali in 1960, the country became open to new foreign influences. As a socialist, the first President of Mali, Modibo Keita (1960-1968), developed ties with countries of the communist bloc primarily. Under the rule of its second President, Moussa Traoré (1968-1991), Mali softened its socialist economic policies, widened its foreign policy, and initiated privileged links with Muslim countries. *Le Pont du Roi Fahd* symbolises an epoch shaped by the petro-dollars of Arabic countries (especially from Saudi Arabia; see Soares and Launay 1999, 515) that had funded the construction of mosques, Islamic cultural centres and religious schools in Mali during the 1970s and 1980s.

The third bridge, *Le Pont de l'Amitié Sino-Malienne* (Sino-Malian Friendship Bridge), was inaugurated on Malian Independence Day the 22 September 2011, as a gift offered by the People's Republic of China to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Independence of Mali (1960-2010). Although Western and Arabic influences are still present in Mali, the third bridge might symbolise a new era of international economic partnership dominated globally by the East and in particular by China.<sup>285</sup> Whereas in 2000 children in Mali greeted me with '*bonjour*', in 2010 children I met during a tour in a village next to Bougouni welcomed me with Chinese greetings. Not used to the variety of whitish skin, they took me for one of the Chinese workers who had been repairing the Bougouni – Sikasso road section for a few months. This anecdote illustrates that the post-Cold War era in Mali has been characterised not only by North-South aid, but also by the increasing business between Africa and China.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Another growing actor involved in technology transfers and farming business is India which opened an Embassy in Mali in 2009.

<sup>286</sup> In less than 20 years China has become an important actor throughout the African continent (see Kernen 2007). Since 2006, the Chinese government has organised regular China-Africa summits that indicate its increasing interest in Africa.



Whereas most scholars have studied the increasing presence of China on Malian soil in terms of investments, buildings and men,<sup>287</sup> I am particularly concerned with opportunities for consumption by ordinary Muslims in Bougouni, which have been enlarged by the rise of new Asian producers and especially by China (see Nguyen 2009; Gaye 2006), or what Michel and Beuret call the '*Chinafrique*' (2008).<sup>288</sup> This chapter stresses that it is mostly through 'things' that the East has recently entered into all Malian households. Connections between Mali and the East are foremost constituted of 'made in Asia things'; so globalisation 'from below' is investigated here as a rapidly accelerating circulation of goods rather than of people and ideas. Nevertheless, a 'thing', although commodified, when in someone's hand is never devoid of meaning and life. In this chapter 'things' are investigated through their consumption, and this process is central to the creation of identities and inequalities (see Van Binsbergen 2005).

Asian-manufactured products have been present in Mali since the inter-war years<sup>289</sup> (e.g. Japanese bicycles); however, they have had a significant impact on most people's lives only from 2000. During colonial and early postcolonial times, the consumption of foreign products (such as clothes, bicycles, hats, sunglasses) 'was carried on piecemeal fashion' in southern Mali (Peterson 2011, 193). Locals named these new objects with 'neologisms' ('bicycle', '*nege.so*', literally 'iron horse'; 'plough', '*misi.daba*', literally 'cattle hoe') because their occasional, limited consumption did not really transform people's ways of life (2011, 194).<sup>290</sup> With the development of road networks and international trade during the postcolonial period, the so-called '*France aurevoir*' products progressively arrived in Malian towns. Nonetheless, these products were expensively imported from the West and hence affordable exclusively for a tiny urban elite. However, the affordability of manufactured products has improved markedly in the last twenty years.

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<sup>287</sup> Mali and China have had diplomatic relations since the independence of Mali in 1960. Although local elders say 'Chinese came with Modibo', their presence was limited to a few state experts, and exchanges between the two countries remained of minor significance until the end of 1990s (see Bourdarias 2009, 8). However, following the privatisation of the Malian market after 1991, and the liberal opening of China under Deng Xiaoping, China boosted its presence in Mali in early 2000 and is now involved in the country through gifts, loans, bilateral aid, private companies and men (see Sanogo 2008). Many major constructions sites in Bamako (such as the Stadium of 26<sup>th</sup> March, International Conference Centre, Modibo Keita Memorial) and within the country have been built by Chinese state companies and financed by Chinese state funds. In parallel to the state channel, during the 2000s a growing number of Chinese have settled in Mali as workers and engineers for private companies or as businessmen in the retail and entertainment sectors. For instance, Chinese are famous for running '*bars-hôtels*' with '*chambres de passe*' at the back (especially in Bamako) that have been criticised by many local Muslim movements as signs of moral decadence (see Bourdarias 2010, 7).

Whereas the growing presence of Chinese in Mali is in general appreciated because of the newness of their partnership, their concrete investments, their easy loans, and their non-paternalistic way of doing business so far, long term Chinese goals are questioned and remain vague. China encourages the influx of Chinese workers to Africa in order to absorb high unemployment in its rural provinces (see Michel and Beuret 2008; Sanogo 2008). The recent diversification of migratory processes of Chinese in Africa stresses the poverty affecting inland China (see Bredeloup and Bertoncello 2006, 213-216) and the harsh competition of its internal national market (Kernen and Vuillet 2008, 76-78). In turn, the growing presence of Chinese merchants on African soil has recently questioned the integrative capacity of African societies traditionally marked by emigration: on the case of Senegal, see Bredeloup and Bertoncello (2006) and Kernen and Vuillet (2008).

<sup>288</sup> By contrast to the former epoch of *Françafrique*.

<sup>289</sup> 1920s – 1930s.

<sup>290</sup> On changes in material culture during the colonial period in southern Mali, see Peterson (2011, 193-198).

In a decade, the 1991 liberal and democratic shift in Mali, in parallel with the rapid development of emerging economies, transformed the nature, the provenance and the scale of manufactured products found in the country. Rapid urbanisation during the 1990s coincided with an influx of cheap and mostly Asian-made items. Thanks to the new opportunities to gain business visas offered by emerging economies, and especially by China, the big merchants of Bamako have been able to supply the Malian market with cheap Asian-manufactured products by making short business trips to the East. These products flood markets, shops and households, and have enabled millions of Malians to gain access to a consumer lifestyle.

The first part of this chapter documents and analyses the increasing importance of ostentatious and fashionable consumption to the conception of an urban way of life (by contrast to a rural way of life) and the evaluation of success in life among Bougouni's Muslims. Following an 'Africa-centered approach to material culture' (see Hardin and Arnoldi 1996), this chapter explores the ways Malian urbanites use made-in-Asia objects to construct identity, distinctions<sup>291</sup> and ideas of success that shape the world around them. In parallel, it examines how changing opportunities for consumption and the evidence of success and failure in material well-being are interpreted and argued over in their Muslim environment.

Consumerism, however, has increased and made more visible the material distinctions in wealth between Malians which, in turn, has fostered jealousy (*keleya*) and made egoism (*negoya*) a source of public concern to the inhabitants of Bougouni. Similarly to Cameroon (see Geschiere 1997; Geschiere and Fisiy 2002), the occult in Mali addresses uncertainty, ambiguity and hidden dimensions of human success and failure in general, and is comparable with a 'social diagnosis' of an urban dream that wakes in moral disquiet, unequal rewards and aspirations (see Moore and Sanders 2002). Within this broad perspective, I want to investigate in the second part of the chapter the occult in relation to the fact that in the Muslim society of Mali 'to be a moral person means to be sociable' (Schulz 2005, 102). As a complement to Schulz's article on the thriving occult practices in urban Mali resulting from current neo-liberal context (Ibid, 108-109), my aim is precisely to study the occult as a way to domesticate social inequalities within a post-1991 era, which seems deeply shaped by various forms of exploitation, marginalisation and individualism that jeopardise trust and loyalty between relatives, friends and neighbours.

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<sup>291</sup> Similar processes of 'social stratification' based on uneven access to material goods operate to some extent in rural Mali (see Koenig 2005).

### ***Riches as a sign of blessing***

Two key ethnographies have analysed interconnections between wealth and Islam in West Africa: *Islam and the Prayer Economy* (Soares 2005b) and *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town* (Masquelier 2009). With regard to Niger, Masquelier (Ibid. xvi) writes that 'Islam is now equated with status, power and *arziki* (a word evoking notions of wealth, prosperity and well-being)'. More importantly, she shows how this equation originated in pre-colonial times and strengthened during the postcolonial period. In the immediate aftermath of the conquest of West Africa, French colonial officials were debating two views of Islamic influence and its spread among Africans: Islam as subversive identity and Islam as raiser of civilisation, work, order and economy (by contrast with 'backward' pagan religious practices). Although the former opinion finally prevailed in the shape of a *politique des races* defending ethnic particularism (ibid, 43-44), the latter prospect illustrates the fact that already in the pre-colonial period Islam was associated with power, status and wealth in West Africa.

This association was especially noticeable in colonial administrative centres such as Bougouni that attracted traders and civil servants among its first Muslims (see chapter 1). In Mali most civil servants of the colonial administration were Muslims educated in French schools, such as the *Ecole Normale William Ponty* in Senegal. Similarly to Niger, many of these 'Westernised' Muslims joined the political party of the RDA (*Rassemblement Démocratique Africain*) and contributed to the association of Islam with power, status and wealth that can be observed in the towns, which are predominantly Muslim. As Masquelier noted 'Muslim identity had become an indispensable ingredient of social and economic success' (2009, 59) in Niger and (I would say) in most parts of West Africa.

During the postcolonial period the logics of the market have reinforced the links between prosperity and religion. With regard to Mali, such mercantile logics have supported the development of a 'prayer economy', an economy of religious practice in which people give gifts to religious leaders on a large scale in exchange for prayers and blessings (see Soares 2005b). In the religious centre of Nioro-du-Sahel, Soares demonstrates how 'religious leaders [considered as saints] have become more privatised religious figures – effectively free-floating sanctifiers – in a religious economy that has come to be more like a market' (Ibid, 153) or what he also calls 'a fee-for-service religion' (Ibid, 246). The sainthood of the two prominent Sufi religious leaders of Nioro-du-Sahel is not only based on their descent, secret knowledge and *barika*, but is also publically judged by the number of their followers and, crucially to my study, by their wealth. In Bougouni, such coupling of piety and wealth in the shape of processes of

commodification of blessings and prayers for gifts is illustrated by the person locals name 'the saint of Kologo'.

The locality of Kologo stands 30 kilometres south of Bougouni just off the national road between Bougouni and Manankoro. This big village and administrative centre of the *Commune Rurale de Tiémala Banimonitié* is distinguished by couple of shops, a weekly market and an impressive brown and turquoise-blue cement Friday Mosque. This imposing religious building was financed by one of the most respected *maraboutic* families of southwest Mali, the Diabaté of Kologo. According to local discourses, the founder of this *maraboutic* lineage settled in the village in the early twentieth century. A Muslim scholar, he progressively convinced local inhabitants to convert to Islam because his *barika* defeated the power of local jinn. His exploits in overcoming *Bamanaya* forces spread his reputation as a pious Muslim blessed by God and persuaded many local residents to consider him as a saint. He was then chosen as the first Imam of Kologo and also opened the first Qur'anic school that contributed to the spread of Islam in Kologo and surrounding villages.

The Diabaté lineage continues in contemporary Mali. In 2009, after the death of his father, the founder's grandson became Imam, *karamɔɔ* (Islamic scholar) and *marabout* of Kologo, the heir to the *barika* of both father and grandfather. The graves of the founder of this saintly lineage and his religious heir are places blessed by God where many Muslims come to commune with the Almighty through their sainthood. Malians and even foreigners travel to benefit from the power of their *barika*. Every Friday during the weekly market of Kologo the threshold of the compound of *karamɔɔ* Diabaté witnesses continuous comings and goings of people wishing to greet 'the saint of Kologo'. Next to the main door, local elders, heads of family, and privileged visitors sit on benches and chairs, converse, observe the unfolding of Friday and wait to accompany their saintly Imam to the Friday prayers. Approaching the Diabatés' garage, one sees a couple of expensive 4x4 vehicles, and motorbikes. The descendants of Diabaté occupy an entire district of Kologo which differs from the rest of the village by its evidence of wealth: numerous cement houses and well-conserved mud houses reinforced with cement rendering, as well as numerous granaries. Blessings and money are not lacking in Diabaté compounds. Here 'prayer economy' provides a comfortable living for an entire district of Kologo.

Most Muslims in Bougouni follow the example of prosperous religious leaders in Mali; they treat consumption as a sign of success in life. Therefore wealth is understood as an index simultaneously of social status, blessing and pious life in general.

### ***The urban way of life: being poor but trendy***

In studying the articulations between wealth and religion, I need to take into consideration a marked feature of African economies: their growing social inequalities. Geschiere and Fisiy (2002), and Nyamnjoh (2002) stressed the importance of this feature in the Cameroonian context of the collapse of development as a transparent and egalitarian process. With regard to Mali, 'over the past few decades, the discourse of "development" has been viewed 'as the panacea for many of the country's problems' (Soares 2005b, 212). After two decades of single-party dictatorship led by Moussa Traoré (1968-1991), a period characterised by droughts, lack of freedom, and constant economic difficulties (see De Benoist 1998; Couloubaly 2004; Elmouloud 2007), discourses of development have been invigorated in the hope of changes in terms of freedom and development brought by the democratic and liberal reforms of 1991. However, contemporary realities have undermined such promises.

Although Mali has benefited from substantial international aid and loans during the past two decades (see introduction), by 2010 many adults and elders of Bougouni were rebuking the failure of development and the moral drift of Malians in general (see chapter 3). The Third Republic of Mali has not countered the effects of the structural adjustments of the 1980s, insofar as many '*jeunes diplômés*'<sup>292</sup> still struggle to find paid employment in a state bureaucracy undermined by clientelism. Whereas markers of material success have multiplied in the urban landscape of Bougouni, they have mainly accumulated in the hands of a minority. Most Malians find themselves excluded from the up-market neighbourhoods characterised by cement houses with *étages*, expensive cars and ostentatious events and ways of life manifested by the tiny minority of wealthy urbanites. They struggle to gain access to small jobs and to make a living (see chapter 4). Other than some urban collective services, such as public lighting, TV provided by the local shopkeepers, tarred roads, crowds, junkets and night-time activities, their life might be as mundane as in rural Mali. Only a handful of successful people keep urban dreams alive in a society characterised by longstanding mass poverty in a new context of increasing social inequalities.<sup>293</sup>

While Malians acknowledged that 'there is money in Mali', they blame the fact that money tends to concentrate in the hands of a minority. This observation does not mean that Malians perceive social inequalities through the Marxist notions of 'class' and 'class consciousness' (see Lukács 1972 [1923], 46-82). For them, Mali is a country in which a tiny minority of urbanites are becoming rich (they are called *patrons*, *mɔ̀gɔ̀baw*, or '*gros*

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<sup>292</sup> See Schulz (2005, footnote 47).

<sup>293</sup> The conclusion of my dissertation will analytically relate economic realities in Mali to the coup d'état of 22 March 2012.

*bonnets*<sup>294</sup>), whereas the overwhelming majority of its people remains poor. As Malians used to say 'Mali is a poor country'. In such a context of longstanding mass poverty, do processes of distinction exist among the inhabitants of Bougouni? And how they work?

The urban way of life is central to perceptions of success in town. Whatever their origin most Malians want to 'go urban' now. For them, the urban area is an open door towards wider trends coming from '*là où ç'est évolué*' or '*là où ç'est civilisé*' (where civilisation is) such as Bamako, Abidjan, Dakar, (...), France, Europe, the United States and beyond. Seen from this perspective, an urban Malian can be poor and '*évolué*' and '*civilisé*' at the same time. Both French terms express a distinction based on the consumption of trendy products of foreign origin which, in turn, give their consumers access to a modern way of life. By contrast, the rural area is associated with manners and products which are deemed as '*arriérées*' (*backward or outmoded*); therefore people who follow a rural way of life in Mali are pejoratively called '*broussards*' (bushmen), a French term which means inhabitants of the '*brousse*' (bush country). According to this set of ideas about distinction, Malians do not see themselves as divided into various classes. In parallel to the distinction between the few patrons and the numerous poor, they perceive Malians as composed of trendy people and backward people. Rural and urban lifestyles are articulated into discourses that shape broader conceptions of social status in Mali.

Urbanites commonly associate the rural world and its village life with negative images and mockeries. Some of them, especially urbanites of urban origin, depict villagers as '*sauvages*' (savage). During a chat with Aminata, a single woman from Bougouni, I asked her whether she would consider marrying a villager.<sup>295</sup> After a couple of general comments, she replied to me:

'A female friend living in a village asked her husband to marry a second wife. She complained to me about the way her husband behaved. After having worked all the day, every evening her husband just told her "take off your clothes" and *boum* (bang). She can't bear it anymore; she is too tired (...). Her husband is a savage!'

Aminata continued her negative remarks with a story about villagers in general she heard in a *tontine*.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> 'Big hats'; this expression usually refers to senior officers of the Malian state. In a study of Bamako *sumu* events, '*gorobinew*' are the wealthy and emancipated women who manifest their generosity during 'rituals of conspicuous consumption of *jeli* praise' (see Roth 2005).

<sup>295</sup> It is not rare to see male urbanites marrying female villagers because the dowry is cheaper when the bride is a villager. Moreover, most female villagers aspire to marry a male urbanite so as to live in town (in this patri-virilocal society).

<sup>296</sup> In Mali most women belong to traditional women's banking associations called *tontine*.

'A young couple of *broussards* had difficulties to have a baby. Suspecting they had no clue about how to make love, one of their cousins brought them to his house in Bamako. Then he put a porn movie on the TV and locked them up in a room. The woman became pregnant not long afterwards [laugh]!

Although Aminata's mobile phone contained a secret file of porn movies,<sup>297</sup> her comments illustrate how *broussards* are often represented as ignorant people who know nothing much except the traditional occupation of '*ɛnɛkɛla*' or 'cultivateur' (farmer). Moreover, the formerly noble activity of farming is increasingly being perceived as unattractive and degrading by the younger generations living in town.<sup>298</sup> Madou, a young man of rural origin and newcomer in town, wanted to change the profession written in his identity card before looking for a job in Bougouni. He thought: 'If I show my identity card I will not be taken seriously because the "*cultivateur*" is not "*considéré*" (esteemed) here.' Ideas about the farmer's lack of good manners and familiarity with modern products are stressed in a popular Malian TV series called *Les Aventures de Sékou Boiré*; it shows, in humorous ways, the difficulties encountered in Bamako by a naive and simple-minded farmer who left his village on the track of his wife after she fled to the capital.<sup>299</sup> Paradoxically, whereas NGO workers and local politicians keep telling the population in their speeches that 'Mali is a country of farmers' and stressing that the development of Mali rest on its farming activities, many inhabitants of Bougouni (especially the youth) systematically belittle what comes from the countryside while giving value to an urban way of life whose manners are based on the consumption of foreign products I explore below.

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<sup>297</sup> Asking to see what kind of music was on my mobile phone, we exchanged our mobile phones for a couple of minutes. While she was manipulating my mobile phone, I was doing the same with hers. Opening a file called by an ordinary title, I discovered porn movies in it.

<sup>298</sup> The nobles and freemen (*hɔɔn*, see chapter 3) were the farmers of the Mande world.

<sup>299</sup> See *Sékou Boire* in Youtube.

## ***A successful life in Bougouni***

Maliens fancy western clothing styles and the traditional expensive *boubou*<sup>300</sup> made of waxed and rich and shiny damasks called '*bazin*'. Previously popular *bogolan*<sup>301</sup> and locally hand-woven thick cotton fabric have almost disappeared from the streets of Bougouni. A *bogolan* maker from a neighbouring village stated that the *yuguyugu*<sup>302</sup> had killed local cotton cloth production, so that youths laughed at a *bogolan* wearer, labelling him '*celui qui porte la peau de vache*' (the one who wears a cow's skin). The revival of *bogolan* from the 1980s in the fine art market (see Rovine 2008) remains an elite phenomenon linked to tourism and collection. Except for the *boubou*, a robe historically linked to Islam and to noble families, which was brought to West Africa by Arab-Berber traders during pre-colonial times, local ways of clothing are mainly interpreted as the backward dress of uncivilised rural Mali.

It is in the city centre, next to the market, where stand the biggest clothing stores of Bougouni, such as 'The American Shop' which displays affordable trends and icons of Western world made by Asian hands. In there you can find a wide range of jeans from classic blue ones to baggy, skinny, crisp-looking and faded ones. The salesmen may also suggest you look at their Italian-style shirts, casual jumpers and Dolce&Gabbana underwear. For icon lovers, the shop also offers a range of T-shirt with prints of 50 Cent, Bob Marley, Didier Drogba, Samuel Eto'o and Barack Obama. 'The American Shop' represents what most clothing shops offer in Bougouni: cheap Western-style clothes and trendy brand imitations bought by the younger Malians who want to be fashionable. To a certain extent, their clients, like the *sapeurs* of Baongo (Gandoulou 1984; 1989) and Peter's group in Mombasa (Behrend 2002), position themselves 'in a global arena informed by the interactions between locally specific practices of self-creation and the dynamics of global processes' (Ibid, 50). The success of boutiques such as 'The American Shop' in Bougouni is due to a growing aspiration among ordinary Malians to be engaged in competition for status, prestige and power in which the consumption of trendy clothing is important.

The once-prized bicycle, bought with money earned on the plantations of Côte d'Ivoire during the early postcolonial period,<sup>303</sup> has become old-fashioned thanks to the arrival of cheap Asian-made motorbikes. When countryside men from neighbouring rural areas come to Bougouni by bicycle during the weekly market, it is not rare to see motorbike and car drivers

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<sup>300</sup> Traditional wide sleeved robe.

<sup>301</sup> *Bogo* (earthly realm); *lan* (coming from).

<sup>302</sup> On *yuguyugu*, see introduction p.4.

<sup>303</sup> On the 'transformative impact' of bicycle on material culture in southern Mali during the second half of the colonial period, see Peterson (2011, 197-198).



jeer at the '*broussards*' on their bicycles because of their alleged ignorance of Highway Code. Since 2000 motorbikes have no longer been exclusive to the tiny minority of wealthy Malians. The arrival of Asian-made motorbikes from emerging countries in the Malian market cut the price of motorbike by 50-75% (compared to Japanese and French motorbikes) in less than a decade. The most commonly found of these new motorbikes in urban areas is the Jakarta, a colourful and easy-to-drive motorbike with low fuel consumption and automatic gears, which is made in China<sup>304</sup> by KTM (see photographs 15 and 16 below).<sup>305</sup> These motorbikes are imported as spare parts put in wooden crates and are assembled in Mali in order to avoid customs duties called '*dédouanement*'.



This fancy motorbike, a conveyance so popular among urban youth that their elders jokingly call them the '*Génération Jakarta*', is also looked on with suspicion as the perfect gift for an extra-conjugal woman partner in Mali. Ostentatious consumption is well illustrated in gender relations by the choice of bride, flirting and love affairs.<sup>306</sup> Oumou, the spouse of a friend settled in Bamako, was a member of a *tontine* based on regional affinities. On a regular basis its membership gathered in one member's house for their activities. She explained to me that the arrival of each of them was commonly subjected to judgements, mockery and jokes. When someone arrived in the back of a big 4x4 driven by an old man, her friends exclaimed '*tu es branchée!*' (You are trendy!). However, if she arrived on the back of a worn motorcycle ridden by a young man, her friends tossed up '*tu sors avec un apprenti duuru-duuruni!*' (You date with a poor apprentice!).<sup>307</sup> In similar vein, youth in Bougouni said that a young man

<sup>304</sup> For locals, 'Chinese have enabled Malians to possess their own motorbike'.

<sup>305</sup> The denomination 'Jakarta' comes from the fact that this motorbike was previously imported from Indonesia.

<sup>306</sup> Such ostentatious practices also permeate life stage events and Muslim celebrations.

<sup>307</sup> On *duuru-duuruni*, see chapter 4.

cannot date a woman on foot. He needs at least a Jakarta for practical reasons as well as for reasons of prestige.

In less than a decade, the mobile phone has also evolved from a luxury product to a basic item among Africans. In early 2000 only new and second hand '*Europe aurevoir*' mobile phones were found in Mali. Sim cards and mobile credits were accessible only for rich Malians living in a couple of big towns connected to the mobile network. The market was monopolised by Malitel, the state company. At that time only 'big men' (patrons, *mogobaw*) possessed a mobile phone. However in only a couple of years this situation changed drastically. The market in communication was liberalised in late 2000. Two years later, Ikatel (affiliated with France Telecom and renamed Orange Mali in 2006) expanded quickly in Mali helped by ambitious marketing strategies that have completely transformed the market in mobile phones there.<sup>308</sup> In a few years, the price of sim card and credits for Orange Mali became affordable to ordinary Malians, and the mobile network reached most rural towns and big villages (such as Sido and Garalo with regard to southwest Mali).<sup>309</sup> Such fast and far-reaching changes were also facilitated by the arrival in Mali of cheap Asian-made mobiles. The formerly upper-class market for mobile communication turned in less than a decade into one of the most dynamic and productive emerging popular markets in Africa (see Hahn and Kibora 2008; Archambault 2010; 2011). Orange Mali was initially praised for its affordability, but later criticised for its too aggressive marketing by Malians themselves. The invention of the '*pastèque orange*' (*zere*, watermelon), a top up credits of 100 francs available in the market since 2008, burdened the already limited budget of most Malian households. In July 2008 an article published in *Le Relais*, a local newspaper of Bougouni, illustrated criticism of the excessive affordability of mobile phones for the majority of the inhabitants of Mali.

' (...) More than 70% of Malians live on no more than 1,000 fcfa per day, then imagine what will come next in Mali; there are two kinds of watermelon: the sweet one found in the soil and the too salty one of Orange Mali which gives high blood pressure to Malians because it burdens the income and the food budget (...)' (Coulibaly 2008).

This watermelon revolution caused the bankruptcy of the market for traditional telephone box in Mali and the spread of mobile phone to all Malians. Furthermore most Malians do not want a simple mobile such as the Nokia 1110. They instead dream of having a double chip mobile phone boosted with memory card and fancy facade and offering Bluetooth, music, video,

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<sup>308</sup> Due to its un-competitiveness, the Malitel state company was sold in 2010 to a Moroccan mobile company.

<sup>309</sup> In a decade, the price of a sim card tumbled from more than 200,000 fcfa to less than 500 fcfa.

photographic and TV services. Usually a mobile phone does not spend long in the hands of any one owner. It is an item subject to routine upgrade, display, exchange and bargain. The mobile phone is the prestige item for the younger generation which particularly symbolises dynamism. It is the technological, clothing-like, item of ostentation par excellence for those who want to 'go urban', to 'be civilised' in contemporary Mali. It is also an instrument of unseen self-fashioning identities and ambivalent experiences and pleasures triggered through intimate communications and the storage of secret files where Drogba, Obama, Islamic sura and pornographic pictures are juxtaposed. It is an important proof of success in life among other goods; as Malians say: '*Chaque mois un nouveau portable; Ça marche bien pour toi!*' (Each month a new mobile phone; things are going well for you!).

Ten years ago, people had to buy their seat in front of the couple of TV sets found in Bougouni. Due to the arrival of made-in-Asia, hence affordable, TV and DVD players, nowadays this line of business is finished: the colour TV has become an appliance found in many urban familial compounds. My friend Boubacar, seller of *yuguyugu* in market of Bougouni, rented a room in a crumbling mud house in Dougounina district of Bougouni where he lived with his wife and his two young boys. His room had no furniture except for a couple of mats and cookware. He was a small trader who struggled to make ends meet; his wife and himself, however, possessed a mobile phone each and a small TV with a car battery that they attached to it when they hosted relatives and friends. In addition, the spread of affordable TV and DVD players has put an end to the audience for cinema in Mali.<sup>310</sup> Next to the *Conseil de Cercle* of Bougouni to the rear of the level area behind the Siraba Togola Auditorium, stand two empty and time-worn buildings. These two previously successful cinemas saw their golden age fading away with the arrival of affordable TV and DVD players in early 2000.

Housing in Mali is also evolving considerably and, again, Asian building equipment is supporting these changes. Cement houses, '*maisons à étages*' (houses with multiple storeys), roofs of sheet metal, modern showers and western toilets have increasingly appeared among the traditional furniture, mud houses and mud fences. These modern fixtures are shaping the urban dream of Mali. The former President, Amadou Toumani Touré (called ATT), even promoted the cement villa as the habitat for ordinary urban families of modern Mali through the ambitious national social housing project called *ATT-bougou* (ATT town/village). The Former Malian Presidents Moussa Traoré and Alpha Oumar Konaré had already initiated projects of social housing in Bamako; however, none of these previous projects enjoyed the success of *ATT-bougou*. This social project was initiated in Bamako in 2003-2004. It aimed at

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<sup>310</sup> The only cinema still in operation in 2010 was the Babemba Cinema in Bamako.

rendering accessible decent cement villas to urban employees with a limited regular budget, such as represented by school teachers, policemen and administrative secretaries. 50% of the villa is directly paid for by the Malian state, and the other 50% is paid on a monthly basis by the owner of the house. As it was a big success in Bamako, Amadou Toumani Touré extended it to all regional towns of Mali. In 2010, more than 3,500 villas had been built thanks to this project. However, the social spirit of the *ATT-bougou* projects started to be criticised in Mali. After a promising start in Bamako, the project turned aside from its social aim; many houses were allocated to rich families instead. Furthermore, not every house is in cement. Some of them are in semi-concrete, and others in mud reinforced with cement rendering. *Radio Trottoir* explained that the economic difficulties of the BHM<sup>311</sup> Bank (the financing body of the project) were due to the greediness of its administrators. The project attracted what Malians call '*le mangement*', or what Bayart names the politics of the belly (1989).

As recurrently highlighted in this section, the urban way of life pursued by Bougouni's inhabitants is largely based on the consumption of foreign products of Asian manufacture. Thanks to their being affordable and available, made-in-Asian goods have become ubiquitous in urban households and have made what were formerly prestige goods available for purposes of self-fashioning by ordinary Malians. Western-style clothes, electronic items and vehicles and housing (among other products) are the contemporary signs of 'material prestige' (Daloz 1990) and ostentatious lifestyle, or what Goodwin calls 'today's society of the spectacle' (see Tamagni 2009, introduction) in urban settings of Mali.<sup>312</sup> However, these cheap made-in-Asian goods Malians call '*produits chinois*' (Chineses products) are of poor quality.

### ***Chinese products are cheap junk!***

One late afternoon in November 2009 I accompanied my friend Yaya, a local civil servant, for a stroll around the 'big market' (*suguba*) of Bougouni. As we were walking along the tarred road, a young woman hailed us. Yaya recognised her as his friend Aïcha and waved back to her. We stopped by her spot, and chatted for a while. Aïcha, a friend of Yaya's family, grew up in the small border town of Yanfolila which is located 91 kilometres west of Bougouni. Five years ago, she moved to Bougouni to stay with her uncle so as to attend a secretarial school.

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<sup>311</sup> *Banque de l'Habitat du Mali.*

<sup>312</sup> Like the Chinese goods found in Dakar and Praia, in Bougouni 'the very competitive prices of these products (...) allow popular clientele to put on a performance' (Bredeloup and Bertoncello 2006, 208).

Afterwards, as she did not find paid employment, she started running a small '*pharmacie par-terre*' (street vendor of medicines) in the centre of Bougouni. When we met her she was seated on a small wooden stool and was looking after a pile of boxes, tablets, and pills displayed on a mat in front of her. While Aïcha and Yaya were taking news from their respective relatives, two young men came and asked for four '*comprimés*' (tablets of paracetamol). Aïcha replied 'Which ones? You want French or Chinese tablets?' They responded 'how much?' She informed them that one French tablet cost 25 francs, and two Chinese tablets cost 25 francs as well. They finally opted for the Chinese tablets, bought them, and continued their way. Aïcha then began to grumble about these French tablets. Although they were not expensive compared to others western tablets, she would not take them again because of the difficulty of selling them. 'Although their qualities are not the same, people prefer the Chinese ones because they are cheaper!' she argued.

Nowadays, most ordinary Malians take the risk of buying Chinese products because this allows them to make further purchases. During the first months of my stay in Bougouni, the lock on my next-door neighbour's door broke. A locksmith came and replaced it with a new Chinese lock. However, this one broke after only two weeks! He told me he preferred to buy a Chinese lock for 1,250 francs which can break at any moment than to buy a French one for 7,500 – 10,000 francs, which might last for years, because he wants what little money he has to buy other things as well: mobile phone credits, a new T-shirt, and small batteries for his flashlight. The locksmith came back and managed to fix the Chinese lock without changing it. After having listened to one of our conversations about the lock issue and Chinese goods in general, an old woman jokingly told us:

'Chinese are very clever. They adapt themselves to your money. Tell them how much you possess and then they fabricate you a product corresponding to your budget. For instance, if you have 2,000 francs for a lock they will give you one worth 2,000 francs. If you have only 200 francs, they will manage to manufacture one worth 200 francs [laugh]' (Fanta, 52 years old, housewife).

For most Malians the price of a product matters more than its quality (although many admit that this strategy might not be the best in the long term). In a local context characterised by mass poverty and livelihood instability (see Gunther 2006),<sup>313</sup> people are concerned to succeed today rather than tomorrow because of the high level of uncertainty about the future. Following this way of thinking, Youssoufou, a former local trader of French products who now

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<sup>313</sup> With regard to broader African contexts, the general disorder and instability of African states (see Chabal and Daloz 1999), and the volatility of African economies (see Makhulu, Buggenhagen, and Jackson 2010), are also factors weighing down the human perceptions of the life trajectory in Mali.

sells only Asian-made products, told me that 'Chinese products are successful because the one who is running after the quotidian is compelled to buy the cheapest products.'

The poor want to gain access to the 'society of consumption' so as to take part in 'globalisation' today, not tomorrow (Bredeloup and Bertoncello 2006, 208).<sup>314</sup> Asian companies have well understood this African niche, so their cheaply manufactured items cover most contemporary material demands, such as beauty products, housing equipment, clothes, medicines, daily life electronic products (TV, DVD, mobile phone), hardware, bicycle, motorbike and spare parts for light engineering. Today a Malian household can be equipped entirely with Asian-made goods which offer an affordable alternative to all sectors of the economy from everyday household goods to machine-tools, tractors and cars. Most of these cheap products originate from China, a country sometimes labelled as 'the factory of the world' (Sanogo 2008). It is not a surprise that they have been termed '*produits chinois*' (Chinese products) by Malians themselves. These Chinese products are slickly marketed in ways that are 'smart' and flexible in following world events. Clothes, cups, stickers, and mobile phone covers of Barack Obama were readily found in Bougouni market way before his election. Street peddlers were selling belts with symbols of Manchester United and Barcelona football clubs in the weekly big market of Bougouni just two days before the 2009 European Champion League final between these two clubs.

'*France aurevoir*', or '*Europe aurevoir*', items are still predominantly used for cars, trucks, computers and heavy engineering products, but the question is for how long? New Asian cars have recently been introduced and used as taxis in Bamako as alternatives to the old and thirsty Peugeot 504 and Mercedes-Benz 190D.<sup>315</sup> Lavish Asian products are also entering Mali, rendering luxury items more affordable for wealthy Malians. For instance, Chinese entrepreneurs are using a famous Malian singer's name to brand their '4x4 Oumsang' (see Oumou Sangaré) sold on the Malian market.<sup>316</sup>

(Photographs 17 and 18: shops selling Chinese products in Bougouni)

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<sup>314</sup> A Malian informant of Bourdarias said 'thanks to Chinese, the poor can buy motorbikes, clothes and shoes of white people!' (2010, footnote 14, 5).

<sup>315</sup> See <http://www.anpe-mali.org/news/operation-1000-taxis-urbain-kenedougou-recoit-ses-taxis-flambants-neufs> (retrieved the 7 April 2011).

<sup>316</sup> See <http://www.afrik.com/article10299.html> (retrieved the 7 April 2011).



During the rule of Moussa Traoré most traders were selling expensive western-manufactured products. At that time to be a trader meant to be rich, since only a minority of people could save enough money to start a business. Today being a trader does not necessarily signify being rich. Start-up costs for trading are much lower than during the epoch of Moussa Traoré; sale of cheap Chinese products (e.g. street peddlers of junk and sellers of Western-style clothes) boosted the uptake of small trade as a complement or alternative to farming for many Malians moving to urban areas.

In the midst of this growing presence of affordable Chinese products the so-called '*France au revoir*' expensive products have not disappeared in Mali; they remain the most desirable, hence prestigious items. Although Chinese products have made what were formerly prestige goods available for purposes of self-fashioning by ordinary Malians, their short-lived usage remind Malians that they are, as Salif the tailor said, 'bad imitations' of western products; 'they are of poor quality' ('*qualité tɛ u la*'). Discussing material desire in Mali, Salif compared the search for superior food with the search for western branded products: 'If you do not find rice, you eat *to*. If you do not find *to*, you eat *seri*. If you do not find *seri*, you drink water.' Whereas rice in Mali is considered as an expensive cereal associated with urban life and feast days, *to* (semolina made of corn or millet) and *seri* (mush made of millet) are traditional dishes of rural Mali. In similar ways, he told me that Malians look for western-quality mobile phones (for instance); if this is not possible, they make do with Chinese mobile phones, while others simply cannot afford any mobile phones. Chinese products have not replaced '*France au revoir*' products; they have added an intermediary level in the hierarchy of goods in Mali.

In the early postcolonial period Malians were divided between a tiny elite, who possessed western products, and the overwhelming majority of people who barely had access to second-hand western products. In post-1991 Mali, people have remained materially

divided, however, into three categories: those who enjoy western-branded products, those who are limited to the so-called 'Chinese products', and those who cannot buy any products because of lack of means. Recent transformations in the local hierarchy of goods mean that urban consumers of Chinese products in Bougouni do not participate fully in a modern consumer lifestyle. As explained below, they only 'sniff around' globalisation. Alou, a local teacher who recently bought a Chinese mobile phone, commented:

'We like French or European products, but they are too expensive. If someone offers you a Chinese mobile phone for a very low price, what can you do?'

Then he jokingly added:

'Chinese are more capitalist than Europeans because their products are *à usage unique* (single-use); they do not last at all! You'll need to buy a new one soon (...) Chinese are eating our money!'

For Alou, the consumption of Chinese products drags ordinary Malians into a sort of vicious circle which impoverishes them. Such cheap products give people access to trendy products, services and technologies, but for a short period of time only. Indeed, Malians often complain about their poor quality by saying '*c'est de la pacotille*' (it is cheap junk) because the purchase of Chinese products gives them only short-term access to consumer lifestyles. Soon they will need to replace Chinese products with new ones so as to re-establish their lifestyles. Therefore, momentary access to a material globalisation does not turn urban Malians into modern consumers. Through a discontinuously segmented consumption of low-quality products, ordinary Malians just keep running after what they see as an up-to-date lifestyle. Only the elite who enjoy western products are fully part of an enduring material globalisation. Furthermore, ordinary Malians who buy costly Chinese products, such as motorbikes and bicycles, have to cope regularly with the problem of their maintenance. It is not rare to see such vehicles stationary for months within a courtyard after they break down. In turn, many Chinese vehicle repair shops have opened in Bougouni, and it is common to see people borrowing some else's vehicle for a date, wedding, or any other public events.

Cheap Chinese products have impacted on Malian society in at least three major ways: (1) providing partial access to a culture of consumption to millions of ordinary Malians, (2) widening access to formerly prestigious goods, now made available for purposes of self-fashioning and distinction by ordinary Malians and (3) strengthening social inequalities based on ostentatious consumption, prestigious materials, and life-style by introducing an



intermediate level in the local hierarchy of goods. 'Things' of the East have provided opportunities for consumption for ordinary Malians and supported consumption as signs of success in life. Although they have not replaced western products at the top of the local hierarchy of goods, success in life does tend to be manifested in a wider range of material prestige and ostentatious lifestyle in contemporary urban Mali.

Finally, we need to look at money, access to it and distribution of it, because without money one cannot participate in the urban way of life in Mali.

### ***When money matters in Bougouni***



The *bogolan* illustrated above (photograph 19), manufactured by an artist from a village near Bougouni, represents a flag with designs of a symbolic and stylised sawfish of CFA francs within the African continent. These two elements were enveloped by the following expression '*l'argent la clef du monde*' (money the key to the world). Access to 'money' (*wari*) is seen as one of the main keys to making a successful life in Mali.<sup>317</sup> Since the neoliberal turn of the 1990s, longstanding African economic austerity has been coupled in Mali with a general polarisation of success in life in terms of wealth and consumption. These changes have accentuated the 'over-monetarization' of everyday forms of sociability (see De Sardan 1996; 1999) in Mali, such as illustrated by the increasing centrality of cash in bridewealth transfers in a context of capitalist expansion (see Grosz-Nagté 1988; Wooten 2005, 25-26). '*Wariko*' (money troubles) keeps one's mind busy because money is scarce, volatile but very powerful; as ever, it can resolve the main earthly challenges (work, family and material success) and

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<sup>317</sup> In West Africa 'money is probably the single most important "thing/good" in ordinary people's ordinary lives' (Guyer 1995, 5).

allow people to move forward in life. Although money has become a mundane necessity, its power is shrouded in 'mystery' (see Guyer 1995, 26). Indeed, Malians often say money is elusive because 'it comes as it goes' (*ale be taa ka na*) and its source remains mostly hidden and associated with secrecy.

*'In life you have to be rich and to be a believer. At least you need to get one. If you are neither rich nor a believer, you will die soon. If you do not have a nice car and a cement house with floors, how you gonna do? You have to be a believer.'* (Sekou, 38 years old, sucreries and cigarettes seller in Bougouni).

Although wealth is understood as an index of blessing and piety, Sekou hints at the notion that money mostly stems from multiple origins whether Islamic or not. Whereas in the Western world people's financial power is represented by their wage, in Mali the wage does not have the same significance. Fousséini, a local state administrator, used to say that 'my wage accounts for less than 50% of my monthly income'. He continued by stating that without '*les affaires*' he would not be able to run his 'family', which includes his parents, siblings, wife and children. As is the case in most local families, he is among the rare family members who benefit from paid employment; therefore he must support his relatives who are jobless. I never knew concretely what he meant by '*les affaires*' because people do not reveal their total income and its sources in Mali. The authority of a head of family and his degree of freedom in terms of personal expenses are substantially based on the fact that his financial power is kept secret. For him 'someone who shows his limits [whether financially or not] reveals his weaknesses'. Nonetheless '*les affaires*' in Mali commonly refers to economic takings people collect through gift-giving, arrangements, privileges and '*mangement*' linked to their work and previous investments in social ties.<sup>318</sup> The same logic of multiple sources applies to local traders in an obvious manner: because their income is not related to a wage labour, their sales fluctuate constantly.

Except for themselves, people do not know exactly who earns what in Mali. Such vagueness and secrecy about money starts within the family between spouses, parents and generations. A person's financial means are always subject to speculation, which gives rise to rumour and gossip within families and in the neighbourhood. This tendency is accentuated as

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<sup>318</sup> Emmanuel Ndioune shows how the meaning of money among Senegalese living in Grand Yoff district (Dakar) differed from that of European members of an NGO dealing with micro-credits (1992). The Europeans did not understand why only an average of 60% of micro-credits is invested in business. In fact, 40% of micro-credits are given as gift to relatives and friends in difficulty. The uncertainty of tomorrow is resolved by circulation of money and goods among members of social networks. The one, who is rich today, will probably be poor tomorrow and vice-versa. The gift is not reducible to money and goods. It can be a service, favour, privilege, contact, pull etc. Moreover, the African saying 'the friend's friend is my friend' extends potential recipients of services. Finally, 'the system becomes a "generalised exchange" of services, small and big, which takes officially the shape of illegal favour' (De Sardan 1996, 105). In absence of networks (that is to say with a deficit of capital of social ties), the favour becomes a bribe.

the distribution of money becomes increasingly unequal. When someone becomes rich quickly, such as in the case of the notorious Malian business man Babani Sissoko,<sup>319</sup> people speak about '*l'argent du diable*' (the devil's money). Indeed, religious discourses and texts in Africa 'reflect the preoccupations of Africans concerning the way in which power is exercised in their societies' (Ellis and Haar ter 1998, 176). Given the increasing economic inequality developing in Sub-Saharan societies, local populations tend to raise questions about how paths to success are produced through the exercise of occult power. In Bougouni, locals explain current social inequalities through sentiments of jealousy, egoism and greed, a situation which often connotes the presence of the occult in town.<sup>320</sup>

### ***Jealousy, egoism and greed***

People's failures and successes are common themes of everyday conversations in *grin*, familial compounds, markets, and in coach stations and during social events. Three words occur often in comments about someone's path in life: 'jealousy' (*keleya*), 'egoism' (*negoya*) and 'greed' (*nata*).

During 2009, the construction of a new CSCOM (*Centre de Santé Communautaire*) in Heremakono Nord was delayed due to discord between autochthonous families and the communal administration. This logjam animated discussions in *grins* late into the night. The new CSCOM had been financed by an American who had married a local woman a couple of years earlier. Unfortunately his wife passed away, and her husband decided to finance a new CSCOM in her hometown. After negotiation, the *Commune Urbaine de Bougouni* allocated land for this piece of social infrastructure. However, the traditional chieftainship of Bougouni impeded the building. As owner of the land, the traditional chieftainship claimed their share of money in this land tenure process. Whether or not the *Commune* attempted to bypass traditional custom and the rights of chieftainship is not important to my analysis. What matters in this case is that many inhabitants of Bougouni believed the egoism (*negoya*) of

<sup>319</sup> On accusations of 'voodoo economics' towards Babani Sissoko in the United States, see articles in the *Los Angeles Times* at <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/aug/17/news/mn-13939/2> (retrieved the 28 May 2012).

<sup>320</sup> Through his study of the 'gift economy' within new form of Pentecostalism emerging in the 1970s among the young and urban middle class in Ghana, Van Dijk (1999) demonstrates how display of social success and upward mobility goes hand in hand with the religious fervour of 'a Man of God'. Moreover, the prestige of a church in Ghana relies also on competitive displays of donations and generosity in order to attract public attention. Such findings present many parallels with the wealthy saints and religious Muslim leaders of Mali. Van Dijk pointed out, however, during the public gift-giving of a brand new BMW-600 series to 'a Man of God', members of the congregation were invited to extract all bitterness within their heart and mind that might be provoked by so extravagant gift (Ibid, 84-86). Such prestigious gifts are desirable but their redistribution is unequal; therefore they heighten jealousy, envy and bitterness among members of the same church.

autochthonous families lay behind this blockage. They were disappointed that the traditional chiefly family jeopardised the development of Bougouni in order to pursue their own greed (*nata*). This story fuelled debate on selfishness for some time in the town. Other illustrations of egoism circulate daily in Bougouni. The success of someone, whether based on moral or immoral acts, almost always stirs up criticism, whispers and gossip.

This section emphasises how wealthy Muslims manage the jealousy of those not as successful as themselves. The following section will balance this perspective ‘from above’ by showing how the poor understand and deal with their unsuccessful situation.

An impressive house stands next to the tarred road and not so far from the town council of Bougouni. In 2010 this three-storey residence was the only building in the whole of Bougouni that was round and cement-built with red tiles roof. The villa consisted of two towers connected by a bridge, and was among the most lavish houses of Bougouni. Every local knows its landlord, the famous politician Mamadou Bakary Sangaré, nicknamed Blaise, founder of the powerful regional political party of *Convention Démocrate Social (CDS Mogotiguiya)*<sup>321</sup> and unsuccessful candidate for the Malian presidency in 2007. Although he was never appointed a Minister, he is more respected than former local Ministers due to his generosity, gifts and buildings in the *Cercle de Bougouni* such as his mansion in Bougouni and the first public generator at Garalo, a little rural town in his native area. Notwithstanding strong suspicions of embezzlement when formerly National Director of *Caisse des Retraites du Mali* (1991-1996) made by local intellectuals of modest status (e.g. teachers, ‘*jeunes diplômés*’ and students), Blaise owes his position among local politicians to the way he has responded to the demands of social life following the logics of gift giving, solidarity networks and redistributive accumulation.<sup>322</sup> Other local former Ministers do not enjoy his fame and fortune. For instance, Yoro Diakité, former Minister of Mines and Energy of Mali (1997-2000) and founder of *Bloc des Alternatives pour le Renouveau Africain* (political party BARA), was known in Bougouni for being allegedly incorruptible. Nevertheless, he neither built impressive houses nor collective buildings in his home town. In 2010 he still lived in Bougouni with his family in a simple urban dwelling situation. According to a local ‘*jeune diplômé*’, over the years the name of Yoro Diakité has tended to be associated with ‘the selfish one who did not achieve anything’ and therefore his reputation is fading in present day Bougouni. How money is used matters more to people in Mali than where it comes from. It is very difficult for a politician to achieve fame

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<sup>321</sup> CDS *Mogotiguiya* is a regional political party created in 1996. This party is not influential outside the *Région de Sikasso*, but it is an unavoidable public force of south Mali and especially in southwest Mali and in the *Cercle de Bougouni*. Between 1997 and 2002, CDS even won all four seats for deputies allocated to the *Cercle de Bougouni*. The current Mayor of Bougouni is a member of the CDS.

<sup>322</sup> On logics of gift giving, solidarity networks and redistributive accumulation, see De Sardan (1996; 1999).

and fortune without making investments in his native region.<sup>323</sup> What happens in Bamako does not have that much impact on someone's reputation in his native region. Locals in the countryside see Bamako and its high political offices as business opportunities. Someone who fails to share the benefits of his privileged positions with his kin, friends and native community is commonly labelled a 'damned child' (*danga den*) in Mali.

The sense of 'togetherness' (*hadamadenya*) and 'solidarity' (*ɲɔgɔndeme*) is important to understanding the texture of local lives in Malian society.<sup>324</sup> Within a context of mass poverty and increasing economic inequality, '*le social*'<sup>325</sup> (a continuous flux of requests coming from the local community) tends to heighten. The rich person who turns a deaf ear to requests is criticised for being selfish and behaving in an un-Islamic manner. Despite suspicion of embezzlement, can we say that people look at Blaise as a pious Muslim? The response would not be straightforward, but Blaise is certainly not considered as a damned child. Overall Mamadou Bakary Sangaré, by his wealth and his achievements, gift-giving and solidarity network, is someone considered by most locals as a well-rounded Muslim who has reached fame and fortune in southwest Mali. Blaise has well understood that, in order to divert popular discontent from oneself, a rich person needs to attract communal approval for generosity. In turn, such an attitude turns a rich man into a genuine '*mɔgɔba*' (patron, literally 'big man'), the one who holds power and is respected because he acts in solidarity with his community.

Other wealthy Muslims, who hold privileged position that are not as public as politicians, can also deploy strategies of economic concealment (modest lifestyle and hidden investments) in order to underplay their wealth so as to contain jealousy in their neighbourhood and to avoid becoming being labelled a selfish person and damned child. For instance, Karim always wears simple, faded and plain working clothes. Although he does not appear to be a wealthy man, he is in fact a rich trader who occupies various economic niches in south, west and central Mali. He lives in Bougouni with his wife and children in simple urban accommodation. He rents a decent villa nevertheless not equipped with fridge, air-conditioner, parabolic antenna, modern shower and toilets and other features of most up-to-date houses. Moreover his compound stands in a quiet area which is located some distance from shops, markets, streetlights and tarred roads. However, he possesses several cars in other regions of Mali and constructs expensive cement houses in Bamako for rental and for his coming

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<sup>323</sup> Nyamnjoh writes that 'individuals who refuse to work towards enhancing their community are those most likely to be denied the public space to articulate their personal desires' (2002, 31). Indeed, the politician Yoro Diakité never held other political offices after his tenure as Minister of Mines and Energy of Mali. His political party has never been successful in local elections.

<sup>324</sup> The French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy states individuals exist because of 'co-existence'. Following his way of thinking in Mali there is no being without 'being-with' in how individuals perceive their position in their community (2000).

<sup>325</sup> On *le social*, see chapter 4.

retirement. He told me simply he does not want to attract people's eyes upon him and his family.

The hope of changes brought by the democratic and liberal reforms of 1991 is running out of steam. In 2010, Mali was characterised by an increasingly unequal distribution and access to wealth which, in turn, has fostered jealousy (*keleya*) and made egoism (*negoya*) a source of public concern to the inhabitants of Bougouni. Whereas successful people need to contain the jealousy of their neighbours, the poor need to control occult threats of 'bad persons' who do not want them to move forward in life.<sup>326</sup> The next section explores how ordinary Malians elucidate social inequalities and its opacity by the occult.

### ***Bad persons, sorcery and witchcraft***

Before departing early in the morning from a village near Bougouni, I wanted to greet a friend who is the Secretary General of a *Commune Rurale* in Mali. Arriving at his home, I found nobody there and decided then to leave, as a gift, a hat and a shirt on the threshold of his room. Directly after, I left and took a coach to Bougouni. Late in the afternoon I called him because I wished to verify he had noticed what I had left for him. In response he started laughing and thanked me for the relief of my call. Indeed he went back home around twelve o'clock and saw the hat and the shirt lying in front of his door. However he had no clue what it was about. Instead of thinking of a gift, he immediately suspected he was the victim of sorcery. He did not touch the clothes, but rather went directly to consult someone knowledgeable in such affairs in order to counteract this potentially malicious act towards his person.

In Mali people fear becoming the target of a malignant force lurking in the shadows that they name '*mogo juguman*' or '*les mauvaises personnes*' (bad persons). As explained by Mc Naughton, the semantic field of '*juguya*' does not necessarily connote a reality in which evil and good stand in clear-cut opposition (1995). Following a general remark about the anthropology of evil made by David Parkin, I start by arguing that in this analysis 'evil refers to various ideas of imperfection and excess seen as destructive; but that these are contestable concepts which, when personified, allow mankind to engage them in dialogue and reflect on the boundaries of humanity'(1985, 23). Discourses about bad persons in Bougouni suggest that

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<sup>326</sup> The nature of tomorrow, Muslims believe, is also determined by invisible forces that need to be solicited through experts in occult sciences (see Toure and Konate 1990).

people's suffering and existential predicaments are also related to an ambivalent power - the occult - which needs to be controlled through *somaya*, the *Bamanan* sorcery.<sup>327</sup>

A *soma* is a *Bamanan* sorcerer. Sorcery is stigmatised by Islam as un-Islamic and evil knowledge, therefore the sorcerer keeps a discreet identity within the local community. Although a *soma* practises sorcery sheltered from public view, people know who he is by word of mouth. In fact, people differentiate between the '*sorcier*' (sorcerer) as healer and spell caster (*soma*) and the '*sorcier*' as witch (*subaga*).<sup>328</sup> Whereas the latter is feared, the former is tolerated. However, because any sorcerer is allegedly not Muslim, people believe the *soma* is able to harm people through his evil knowledge. Indeed, someone can pay the *soma* to do '*baara juguman*' (bewitchment, literally 'evil work') to someone else by means of different sorts of '*dabali*' (spell). In Bougouni people especially fear '*korote*', a deadly evil work which is thrown at people in order to kill them; often people relate *korote* to sudden death in town.<sup>329</sup> The *soma* is also known to prepare '*pudiri*'<sup>330</sup> (powder) people mix with victims' meals so as to charm them. When someone is suspected to be the victim of such occult threats people say '*elle/il a été beaucoup travaillé*'.<sup>331</sup>

Whereas the *soma* is a morally ambiguous figure, the very evil character of sorcery is expressed in the term *subaga*. This word is translated as 'evil sorcerer' (see Bailleul 1996); I translate it by the English word witch. Witchcraft in *Bamanankan* is therefore *subagaya* (or *subaaya*). Its etymology is composed of two meaningful words: *su* (night) and *baga* (poison). *Subaga* is the poison that devours people from within during the night, which is the time par excellence of darkness, fear and betrayal (see chapter 7). The witch is feared, but he/she is not uncovered; at most he/she is suspected. Indeed, the witch is usually depicted as a human (whether male or female) who is able to change into various evil creatures during the night and attack his/her victims from within; nocturnal animals, such as the owl, are among the many shapes a witch can take during the night.

In Bougouni, the reality covered by bad persons is complex. It can either be malicious people who ask the *soma* to harm someone through *baara juguman*, or people who are

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<sup>327</sup> Locals can go to the marabout for similar reasons as well. The marabout (or *Karamɔɔ*) is able to employ occult forces, however, by invoking God. Whereas a *soma* is an expert in '*Bamanan baara*' or '*somaya*' (*Bamanan* sorcery), a marabout is an expert in Islamic esoteric sciences. Given that a marabout works within the moral universe of Islam, people commonly said that a true marabout refuses to harm people; the one who does so is a sorcerer disguised as a marabout. Nevertheless both experts deal with occult and destructive forces. On a comparison between *somaya* and *karamɔɔya*, see Schulz (2005, 97-101).

<sup>328</sup> In her analysis of the occult in Mali, Schulz differentiates *soma* from sorcerer in the same way I differentiate sorcerer as *soma* from sorcerer as witch. I decided to do so in order to respect the fact that my informants used the French word '*sorcier*' for both categories while differentiating them in *Bamanankan*. Despite our different categorization of the occult in Mali, we both stress the moral ambiguity of the *soma* and the clandestine immorality of the *subaga*.

<sup>329</sup> On a rare trial against *korote* accusation attempted during the colonial period, see Meker (1980, 144-145). Such trials never happened during the postcolonial period.

<sup>330</sup> Fr. Poudre.

<sup>331</sup> This French expression is the literal translation of its *Bamanan* idiom in which the verb '*ka baara*' (*travailler*, to work) means 'to bewitch'.

witches themselves who try to devour someone from within. In both cases, bad persons may be suspected but never discovered. Their confusing and shifting identities reinforce the atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust pertaining to occult schemes in general and stress the abhorrent but clever nature of the evil agent (see Parkin 1985, 1). However, inhabitants of Bougouni always link bad persons to egoistic and jealous people who do not want others to progress in life.

It happens that the poor, who feel overwhelmed by suffering and existential predicaments, understands their inability to advance in life to result from bewitchment. In *grin* it is not rare to listen to people who express their disappointments by saying '*ko ka ca!*' This idiom is translated as 'difficulties are numerous', or 'affairs are many and manifold' (Jansen 2009, 113). *Ko* is a dense and polysemous word which can signify 'affair', 'problem', 'difficulty', 'need', 'envy', 'custom,' 'action' and 'behaviour' (see Bailleul 1996). However, foremost *ko* means a serious affair and expresses the complexity of everyday life. *Ko* may be added to another word if the speaker wants to specify the issue. For instance, one might say *musoko/ceko* (problem of woman/man), *duminiko* (food concern), *baarako* (work concern), *wariko* (problem of money), (...). '*Ka ca*' means 'there are many'. Usually people accentuate the '*ca*' (many). Hence '*ko ka ca*' conveys the overwhelming roughness of daily life realities, expectations and challenges. People refer also to '*dijennatige ka gelen*' which can be translated as 'earthly path is demanding'. Most Malians struggle to make a living or to give a new direction to their life. The difficulties of everyday struggle can lead people to feel blocked in a world of bad persons. The impression of going nowhere fast, despite their efforts to do so, leads them to think that an evil force, originating in the jealousy and egoism of bad persons, obstructs their moving forward in life.

Many Malians complain about the egoism of others, such as Madou the builder who is concerned about the low wage he receives from his patron. He does not eat lunch because his daily wage is just enough to cover familial expenses back home. His boss driving a 4x4 Toyota and living in cement villa with parabolic antenna is just a selfish man who does not care about the living conditions of his employees. Salif spent a couple of years as a tailor in the sewing workshop of Yaya, but he did not manage to save money for trading or for his wedding. For him, 'Yaya is not good. He does not like it when people move forward in their life'. Over the years Salif became dissatisfied with his job in Yaya's workshop. He had been doing only basic jobs there, with little earning potential, because Yaya did not want to teach him the profitable embroidery work; hence, he could not conceive of a prosperous future in Yaya's workshop. So, he quit his job because, as he argues, it was not lucrative due to the egoism of Yaya. Other accusations of egoism are more hidden, complex, and insidious such as explained below.



Alou, a student in the *Institut de Formation des Maîtres* (IFM), is in Bougouni ‘*malgré lui*’ (despite himself). He grew up near the town of Koutiala, but was compelled by his father to live with his older sister who married a merchant of Bougouni. There he started working in the two shops belonging to his sister’s husband. It did not work out. As he achieved the DEF (secondary school diploma) in Koutiala, he then started the IFM in Bougouni. Although he benefited from a state grant, he was not successful in this enterprise either. At the time, he had just finished his exam period and had been anxious about the coming results. He was also engaged in a complex love affair. The young woman in question was already married<sup>332</sup> and had two other suspected lovers in Bougouni. For a couple of years Alou had undergone successive failures in building his life. He tried different things, but most of them turned out badly. He then began to visit *Bamanan* sorcerers regularly in order to assess and contain the influence of the occult in his life. The *soma* told him that he had been bewitched by an old man from the neighbourhood who did not want him to succeed in his various enterprises.

Despite all his efforts, Salif also felt his projects were not making progress. He wanted to move forward in life, but he did not know which strategy to take. So he visited a *soma* in order to realise his longstanding desire to trade and marry.<sup>333</sup> The *soma* explained Salif’s lack of progress as the result of bad people; their evil forces were impinging on his person. Apparently one old person among his family did not want him to move forward in life. Moreover one young woman he sees frequently wanted to harm him. *Somaw* never name bad persons. Their precision stops at gender and approximate age (if possible). Suspicions heightened, Salif directly thought about the mobile credits saleswoman sitting next to his daily *grin* as the nasty one willing to hurt him. He thought she does not like him, but doubts remained. Who are these bad persons who do not want Salif to succeed in Bougouni?

In general, the *soma* asks for between 100 and 200 fcfa to make ‘an occult diagnosis’ of a client. Then the *soma* needs to perform a ‘sacrifice’ (*saraka*) on the behalf of a client so as to attempt to contain the occult threat upon him/her. Depending on the gravity of this clandestine threat, the *soma* requests a client to bring him a few kola nuts (red or white), a chicken, a cock or a goat and money for the most serious cases. Salif told me that ‘*soma* can remove difficulties only; it eases your path.’<sup>334</sup> He added that ‘*geleya*’ (difficulties) here can be associated with ‘*mogo juguman*’, ‘*subaga*’, or ‘*sababu juguman*’.<sup>335</sup> The cycle of ‘occult diagnosis’ and sacrifice can continue until the occult threat is completely contained, or a client

<sup>332</sup> Her husband had quit Mali two years earlier to pursue adventure in Spain.

<sup>333</sup> Salif had been in touch with sorcerers since his previous village life.

<sup>334</sup> *Soma be se geleya bo dɔɔn. Ale be i ka sira nɔɔya.*

<sup>335</sup> See chapter 4.

decides to stop it (usually because of lack of money) or to visit another expert in occult sciences.

The world of bad persons in Bougouni acts as a reflexive by-product of social inequalities. In a general manner, the occult here is 'one way of interpreting the opening up of new horizons and new opportunities' as a deeply selective process (Ciekawy and Geschiere 1998, 6).<sup>336</sup> In the edited book *Postcolonial Subjectivities in Africa*, Werbner invites the reader to analyse 'modern subjectivism' as 'constituted by artistic self-fashioning, globally driven consumption and the struggle for control of identity, autonomy and explicit consciousness' (2002, 7). In Mali access to money is seen as the key to someone reaching their aspirations. But unequal access to the economic sphere and its volatility highlight the struggle over control of identity and autonomy in terms of aspirations. Here, social inequalities are domesticated in the shape of accusations of egoism and jealousy towards bad persons acting secretly at the heart of Malian society and beyond. As Nyamnjoh writes, 'in general, if people had what they merited, and merited what they had in liberal democratic terms, there would be little need for a hidden hand of any kind, real or imagined. But because nothing is what it seems, the invisible must be considered to paint a full picture of reality' (2002, 37).

At a community level, the actions of bad persons are often related to jealousy and egoism as aspects of the hidden aggression of relatives, friends and neighbours. This emphasises how it is delicate but very important to know who are your enemies and allies if you want to move forward in life. Trust and mistrust within home and community is explored in the last part of this chapter.

### ***Social harmony, restrained sentiments and trust***

In Bougouni, preserving social harmony may involve silence, discretion and even lies, but it is often preferable to voicing a painful truth in public which can undermine social bonds and bring 'shame' (*maloya*) on and between families. One morning Aïcha, the head of family where I lived, informed me that our house had welcomed a new born that day. To my utmost surprise, Kadiatou the housemaid gave birth to a little boy late in the night. How disrespectful I was in not having been able to notice her pregnancy! For a short moment, I felt ashamed of

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<sup>336</sup> In her analysis of the occult in Mali, Schulz explains these new opportunities as a source of conflict. 'New images and goods of consumption inspire in women (and men) new ideals of greater individuality and a "modern" life orientation. These wishes are diametrically opposed to the scarcity of economic resources; they translate into numerous daily conflicts over material issues between husband and wives, among co-wives or between friends' (2005, 103).

my ignorance, but I quickly started to ponder my sentiments when Aïcha explained to me that this new born was unfortunately an illegitimate child. As a result, Kadiatou concealed her pregnancy from public attention as much as she could. Kadiatou behaved as if nothing happened. She never stopped working until the day of his delivery. The silence of those who knew, her strong and round proportions and her loose traditional clothing, helped her pregnancy to grow unnoticed. In fact, the father of this new born is already married and lives a little further down the road with his wife, children and parents. Kadiatou herself is also married to a man who lives in the *Région* of Kaye. She came to work in southern Mali in order to finance her wedding trousseau. Such a shameful birth should not be allowed to trouble social harmony between neighbours, within families, and between husband and wife. After a quick and secret baptism<sup>337</sup> conducted without Islamic scholars, crowd or party, the husband of Kadiatou's big sister came to Bougouni and moved her and her child to another locality. We have not heard of her and her little boy since.

In Mali, many shameful affairs are negotiated behind the scenes of social life because, above all, families and their members aim to preserve social harmony between themselves and with their neighbours. This focus on social harmony and public conduct involves silence and discretion in the construction of the quotidian. Many issues are not openly discussed in everyday life because they are deemed shameful. Relatives, friends and neighbours tend to restrain public expressions of disagreement, antagonism and even rivalries between them so as to preserve social harmony.

The imperative of social harmony therefore inclines people to keep negative sentiments between themselves and out of public knowledge. In this way dissensions and conflicts between relatives, friends and neighbours remain mostly unspoken matters. As is customary, the parties to the conflict can send their representatives so as to avoid shameful conduct provoked by direct confrontation. However, people are aware that there is a risk that such negative sentiments can deteriorate, become destructive and turn into occult aggression. When silence and discretion are preferable to truth for the preservation of social harmony, the transparency of moral life becomes opaque. In such contexts, social life tends to be characterised by a 'gray zone' where suspicions of multiple allegiances and shifting loyalty are common (see Thiranagama and Kelly 2010). Therefore values of 'loyalty' and 'confidence' (*danaya*) are crucial social resources in an earthly path bound to social ties, but at the same time, undermined by rampant suspicions, accusations and betrayals within same social ties.

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<sup>337</sup> The father wanted neither to recognise the new born, nor to attend his baptism. But Aïcha threatened to publicise his shameful act if he refused to do so. Thanks to the education and responsible patronage of Aïcha, Kadiatou's baby received a proper birth certificate. Many families do not allow an illegitimate child to be born within their compound. Most illegitimate children do not have birth certificates in Mali.

Approaching the end of my stay in Bougouni, Alou's behaviour became very ambiguous. Salif discovered Alou had been lying to his close friends about his various activities for months. Not only did Alou not pass the IFM exams, he had failed them a second time. As a consequence, he lost his grant and was expelled from the school; but he never admitted that. Furthermore, without money and shaken by his complex love affair, Alou was inventing twisted stories to friends, taking on debts and divulging his concerns to the wrong persons. Some accused him of finding easy women for truck drivers on their way to Bamako and Abidjan in exchange for hundreds of francs. What affected Salif the most was that Alou's attitude demonstrated that his friend never really trusted him as a reliable person. Salif started to feel betrayed by Alou. Later, Salif visited me. Looking very preoccupied he warned me about Alou's shifting intentions. He told me '*ale tɛ a nin ni jugu don*' which means 'he does not know who is his ally and who is his enemy'. He advised me not to trust Alou any longer and even to avoid him because he realised how Alou was now completely devoured by jealousy. Indeed, he confided to me that recently he had tried to warn Alou about the fact that he had been wasting money for too long in a love affair that had no future. Alou reacted aggressively: he held a gun to his head and accused him of being attracted by the same woman. Alou was not a 'trustworthy man' (*danaya mɔɔɔ*) anymore. He even became threatening. Some even accused him of being a witch. Progressively Alou lost the confidence of people in the *grin* and disappeared from our view.

In order to stress the importance of the other in life, my host father used to tell me the following *Bamanan* proverb, 'someone cannot do things alone; someone comes from someone's arm and goes to someone's arm'.<sup>338</sup> Indeed, social ties are crucial to anyone who wants to succeed in life in Bougouni. However, being able to discern enemy from ally is particularly difficult in a social context dominated by the imperative of social harmony. Betrayal can dwell and grow secretly at the heart of any self through destructive sentiments such as jealousy and egoism. In this way sorcery and witchcraft should not be treated as pure fantasies because human negative sentiments are real and shape social order. Whereas most people let them go (or at least accept them), others nurture them to the point of becoming overwhelmed by them. Such people are able to hate and plot silently against someone while at the same time being his/her friend. The occult in Mali is rooted in this clandestine world of negative sentiments against others in the context of increasing social inequalities. Successful persons are those who know people's loyalty and control people's greed.

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<sup>338</sup> *Mɔɔɔ tɛ se ka fen kɛ mɔɔɔ ko; mɔɔɔ bɛ bɔ mɔɔɔ bolo la, ale bɛ ta mɔɔɔ wɛrɛ bolo la.*

My analysis of the occult in contemporary Mali supplements the one made by Schulz in her book chapter called 'Love potions and money machines: commercial occultism and the reworking of social relations in urban Mali' (2005). As she wrote 'to be a moral person means to be sociable' in Mali (Ibid, 102) because, whether patron, Muslim saint or ordinary Malian, success on earth is bound to social ties. However, increasing material distinctions observed in Mali coupled with economic scarcity are bringing about a situation in which competition between people is undermining their traditional 'circuits of exchange and moral obligations' (Ibid, 107) or what Malians refer to '*le social*'. Their ability to 'attract' (*sara*, literally 'charm') collective solidarity seems to be impaired by growing neo-liberal accumulation (Ibid, 102). In this way, people try to 'rework social relations' and to transform them as a source of redistribution and income through occult interventions. Schulz's analysis departs from the fact that social inequalities in Mali entail various forms of exploitation, marginalisation and individualism that jeopardise trust and loyalty between relatives, friends and neighbours. The East in Mali and Muslim saints fit into this broad life landscape shaped by an increasing turn towards power, status and wealth based on money, material prestige and ostentatious life-style.

## 6. Youths, elders and the controversy about *Zikiri*

In the morning I used to stop for a while by *shefantigiw*<sup>339</sup> located at the busy exit towards Sikasso along the international Bamako-Abidjan tarred road crossing the town of Bougouni. There I started the day by drinking a strong Nescafe coffee and chatting with traders and passers-by while observing the big trucks, coaches, cars and activities around me. People of various economic and social backgrounds were encountered in these spaces of transit; listening to their conversations I could gain an insight into themes and debates shaping the public sphere in Mali and beyond. I once sat around a lively table at my favourite *shefantigi*. Clients were chatting about many subjects: a serious accident that had happened recently in Bougouni, the difficulty of finding '*monnaie kun*' (basic financing for starting a small trade) in Mali, and the controversial *zikiri* coming out of someone's mobile phone.<sup>340</sup>

The *Bamanan* word *zikiri* comes from the Arab word *dhikr* (or *zikr*); it signifies 'the remembrance or recollection of God – a recollection that can be performed either silently or aloud' (Schimmel 1976, 167). According to Sufi tradition, *dhikr* is a mystical performance, typically involving the repetition of the Names of God,<sup>341</sup> supplications or formulas taken from Hadith texts and verses of the Qur'an in order for the Muslim to come closer to God.<sup>342</sup> The practice of *dhikr* is usually done individually; in some Sufi orders (such as Qadiriya and Tijaniya in Mali) it is also instituted as a group activity. Its practice is flexible because it is permitted at anytime and at any place. Nonetheless, *dhikr* practices in Mali are generally not accompanied by musical instruments because, according to most local Muslim scholars, music allegedly promotes heedlessness rather than devotional concentration.

The clients to whom I was speaking commented on *zikiri* as a song accompanied with guitars and drums; this so-called '*zikiri*' in Mali is controversial mostly because of its musicality. A young teacher in the *médessa*, who was also street peddler during school break, pointed out that many Muslim scholars blame the entertaining character of musical *zikiriw* for inducing forgetfulness therefore being disrespectful towards Islam, the Prophet and God. However, he had nothing against such *zikiriw* as long as their lyrics were in agreement with Islamic sacred texts. The owner of the mobile phone, a young *wotigi*<sup>343</sup> in a nearby gold mining site called

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<sup>339</sup> *Shefan.tigi* literally means the owner (*tigi*) of chicken's egg (*shefan*); as a shop it would be "*shefantigi yoro la*". To simplify, I use *shefantigi*, either as person, or shop depending on the context of the phrase.

<sup>340</sup> Spaces of transit in Mali are also a sort of '*Radio-Trottoir*' where 'rumour' and 'political derision' shape information (Nyamnjoh 2005, 218-220).

<sup>341</sup> On a study of the divine names of God, see Gimaret (1988).

<sup>342</sup> On the practice of *dhikr* and its mystical dimensions in Sufism, see Schimmel (1976, 167-178).

<sup>343</sup> *Wo.tigi* literally means the owner (*tigi*) of a hole (*wo*) in a gold mining site. Being a *wotigi* usually connotes experience and success in traditional gold washing. Newcomers in gold mining site start to work as '*creuseur*' (digger). They dig a hole where gold is expected to be found. Their work is harsh and risky; the outcome is uncertain. If they find enough gold in the hole, they can

Damanda,<sup>344</sup> liked such musical *zikiri* because they mix the pleasant (music) with the useful (Knowledge of Islam). The *shéfantigi* added that the deceased local religious figure El-Hajj Ladj Blen<sup>345</sup> used drums to call Muslims for the communal prayer in the Bougouni mosque; he also stressed that Christians accompany their prayer (*ka Ala deli*)<sup>346</sup> with music so as to ease the learning (*ka kalan*) of the religious message. A student at the IFM of Bougouni concluded the discussion by saying ‘Häidara agrees to these *zikiriw*. The extremists<sup>347</sup> disagree with them because they do not change with the society!’

For these young clients, the label ‘extremists’ cast a wide net over those who did not change with the society, in other words Muslim traditionalists, like most of their elders. Indeed, many elders criticise the musicality of such *zikiriw*. For them, this kind of *zikiri* is a ‘new thing’ (*ko kura*) that has nothing to do with the fact of ‘getting closer to God’ (*ka hakili jigin Ala la*) found in the practice of conventional Sufi *dhikr*. Listening to *zikiri* is rather a ‘childish’ (*denmisenw*) activity which provokes mockery among the elders in Bougouni. Others accuse the entertaining character of *zikiri* of being un-Islamic and disrespectful towards Islam.

‘Religious singers’ (*zikirikelaw*) in Mali initiated the so-called ‘*zikiri*’ in the late eighties by adapting the remembrance of God to contemporary local music; they started to chant the recollection of God, the Prophet and his descendants accompanied by drums, guitars and other local instruments. Such musical *zikiriw* quickly became popular among Malian youth; tape cassettes of musical *zikiriw* were found in most local markets in 2010. One of the religious singers, Nouhoum Dembélé, even rose to fame and became a sort of pop star among young Muslims in Mali. In this chapter I explore the process of religious pluralisation occurring in contemporary Mali (see introduction) in relation to disagreements between generations over ideas of modernity through ethnographies of musical *zikiri* in Bamako and then in Bougouni. I do so by investigating the nature of success of the best known promoter of musical *zikiri*: Mali’s most popular religious leader Cherif Ousmane Madani Häidara, the founder and spiritual guide of the powerful *Ansar Dine* Muslim association.<sup>348</sup>

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become a *wotigi* (or investor). Then they either provide food and water for the diggers, or buy dynamite to blow up rocks. At the end, the diggers and the investors share the total amount of extracted gold in equal parts.

<sup>344</sup> South Mali has been known for its gold and traditional gold washing sites since the colonial period (see Meker 1980, 169-170). With the recent development of gold mass-extraction there through the implementation of modern mines (Anglogold and Randgold Resources), Mali has become the third largest gold producer in Africa. The sites, where gold was found in insufficient quantity for mass extraction, still attracted traditional gold washing in 2009; when new sites are discovered people flock there to do traditional gold washing. One of them, the Damanda, was located 8 kilometres from Bougouni in the *Commune Rurale* of Kola; locals perceived these sites as standing outside custom and law; they said there ‘you do what you like’ (*ε be min fe, ε be a ke*). However, few people hit ‘the jackpot’. Thousands extracted just enough gold for daily expenses. On the ambivalent ambiances, liminality and hardship found in traditional gold washing sites, see the documentary *Ceux de la Colline* (Goldblat 2009).

<sup>345</sup> On the role of El-Hajj Ladj Blen in the spread of Islam in southwest, see chapter 1.

<sup>346</sup> *Bamanan* speakers differentiate ‘Islamic prayer’ (*ka seli*) with ‘Christian prayer’ (*Ka Ala deli*). The verb *ka deli* signifies to ask for, to beg and to solicit (Bailleul 1996).

<sup>347</sup> ‘Les extremists.’

<sup>348</sup> In April 2012 people around the world read in the media that an armed rebellion led by the MLNA Tuareg movement and various Islamist militias, such as ‘Ansar Dine’, had conquered northern Mali. For Brian Peterson, ‘the other Ansar Dine’ led by ag-

### *The success of Haïdara and Ansar Dine in Mali*

The anthropologist Dorothea Schulz has argued the success of Haïdara among ‘the urban lower middle classes’ is due to his oratorical skills and his sermons recorded in small media which focus on ‘ethical self-improvement’ in situations of economic scarcity and ‘moral perplexity’ characterising post-1991 Mali (2003).<sup>349</sup> In another paper, she explained his success in Mali by his ‘disengagement from immoral politics’ and his vague definition of his ‘alternative moral community’ in a ‘situation characterized by the failure of the state to capture the allegiance of its citizen to the nation’; therefore Malian Muslims can easily identify with Haïdara’s ‘simultaneously inclusive and exclusive’ rhetoric interventions (2006a, 134; 143). My analysis of the success of Haïdara in Mali builds upon but differs in two respects from hers.

I would nuance Schulz’s view that ‘at the heart of Haïdara’s appeal to an alternative moral community is a void, as he refrains from defining Muslim identity in any substantial terms. In this fashion he leaves the line of demarcation between “true Muslims” and other Muslims porous at best’ (2006a, 143-144). Most ordinary Muslims conceive of piety as both the practice of Islamic precepts and as self-discipline; this twofold nature of piety is the thread running through Muslim life in Bougouni and beyond, such as illustrated by ‘zigzag’ Muslims in chapter two and the noble Muslim in chapter three for instance. Schulz does not incorporate this twofold nature of piety which frames religious experience and its moral evaluation in Mali. Ordinary Muslims I met understand Haïdara’s teaching as an Islam rooted in someone’s ‘conscience’<sup>350</sup> because, as he argues, the practice of religious precepts and the display of religious signs does not necessarily transform a Muslim into a good Muslim. This chapter asserts that Haïdara’s portrayal of Islam as a form of moral guidance more than a dogma about practice seduces many Malians by the pragmatic and flexible approach it confers in the quotidian.

*Ansar Dine* was still growing in 2009-2010; members of *Ansar Dinée* section of Bougouni were busy supervising the opening of new *sous-sections* in rural southwest Mali.<sup>351</sup> The recent spread of *Ansar Dine* I observed in rural Mali convinced me not to interpret the success of Haïdara as solely an urban phenomenon. In this chapter, I argue that the success of

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Ghali probably chose the same name as the pacifist *Ansar Dine* association led by Haïdara so as to ‘highjack the movement’ or to ‘sow confusion’ in people’s minds knowing that the pacifist *Ansar Dine* is by far the most popular Muslim association in Mali (2012).

<sup>349</sup> According to Soares (2005, 234-235; 252-255), the success of Haïdara is mostly due to the popularity of his recorded sermons in ‘the country’s lingua franca’ (*Bamanankan*). In this way, he managed to reach the vast majority of Malian Muslims, to build a ‘national reputation’ and to become a ‘Muslim media star’. By contrast, preachers in Niore-du-Sahel did not record sermons as much as Haïdara. They also did not record them in *Bamanankan*. Therefore, their audience is relatively small compared to the one of Haïdara.

<sup>350</sup> On the relation between *conscience* and piety, see chapter 2.

<sup>351</sup> *Ansar Dine* Mali is organised in a pyramidal structure: *bureau national*, *sections*, *sous-sections* and *comités*.



Haïdara in Mali is mostly due to the support he receives among the younger generations in a country where most of the inhabitants are under 30 years old.<sup>352</sup> Young people account for an increasing proportion of the African population; ‘decreases in infant and child mortality, combined with high growth rates, mean that the distribution of the population is heavily skewed towards younger people’ (Durham 2000, 114). Post-1991 Mali is characterised by an increasing religious pluralisation in which the young people are the most numerous recipients of competing religious discourses. Haïdara has many sympathizers among young Muslims because, as I develop in the following sections, his marketing of religion connotes an Islam that considers the youth as rightful religious actors instead of bad Muslims. His entertaining Muslim teaching, such as illustrated by the musical *zikiri*, speaks directly to their preoccupations because it integrates Islam into the mundane world in which they were born and grew up. Given the importance of the category of youth in this analysis, we first need to clarify who are the youths and elders of contemporary Mali before moving forward in this chapter.

### ***Youths and elders in contemporary Mali***

In Mali, a young person (whether female or male) can be defined as someone single because marriage is seen as the main gate to adulthood. One does not however achieve fully adult status until becoming a parent as well. Salif the tailor used to joke about his single and childless status by naming himself ‘naked single man’ (*cegana kulukutu*). The metaphor of nakedness here associates parenthood with the dress of an adult without which adulthood is not complete; therefore such a person is still ‘naked’. The eldest brother of my host family told me he was called ‘big brother’ (*kɔɔ.kɛ*) by unmarried and older co-workers because, unlike them, he was already married and father of many children.

In parallel, the use of age labels in conversation, such as ‘junior’ (*dɔɔɔ*) and ‘senior’ (*kɔɔ*), shapes youth and senior as ‘social shifters’ rather than specific age groups<sup>353</sup> or cohorts (see Durham 2000, 116-117). In this way, youth can also be a situational label that draws attention to relations of power, rights, expectations and hierarchy between people. When an adolescent called me ‘senior’ or ‘big brother’<sup>354</sup> in Mali, he framed our relational configuration

<sup>352</sup> Indeed, 47.3 per cent of Mali’s population is under the age of fifteen in 2011 (CIA 2011).

<sup>353</sup> In the Mande world of pre-colonial times, age grades and adulthood were clearly demarcated and marked in associations of initiation and through rites of passages. The village of Kola still hosted a cult of *komo* in 2010, but many young people did not attend it; on *komo* cults, see Dieterlen & Cissé (1972) and McNaughton (1979) ; on *Bamanan* institutions of initiation, see Colley (2001).

<sup>354</sup> The same logic applied to women as well: ‘big sister’ is called ‘*kɔɔ.muso*.’

by associating my status with the respect attributed to seniority there. When 'senior' and 'junior' are uttered between two people of similar age, their usages became contingent, strategic and negotiable.<sup>355</sup> An elder can be the junior in relationship to another elder, and an adolescent can be the senior in relationship to another adolescent. This situation connotes a flexible usage of the notion of youth in Mali. Being young can also be associated with adulthood in Mali. *La Jeune Chambre Internationale* of Bougouni defined itself as 'association of young people between the ages of 18 and 40'.<sup>356</sup> Many of its members were married parents. Indeed numerous associations of youth in Mali are constituted of people Westerners would consider as mature adults.

Nonetheless, youth and elder are relatively distinct in Mali when people speak about the epoch in which they grew up.

Moussa (75 years old): 'I have 8 sons. Nobody wants to cultivate my field. They all want to work in offices instead'.

Ablaye (35 years old): 'It is your fault. You did not educate us correctly as your parents did [smiling face]'.

Moussa: 'When I was a child, we could do two years without going to Tilé [the village next to Bougouni]. We stayed here. We worked hard. We paid one coin for listening to the voice coming out of the music box of the commandant Méker. People of Tilé came here so as to listen to this music box as well. When we saw the first truck coming here, we ran away because we were afraid of it! [laughing]. At that time it took 8 days to go by foot to Bamako, and 3-4 days to Garalo. Now you can go to Kidal in one day. You can go eating in Abidjan on taking a flight from Bamako! It is not the same thing anymore. We could not educate you the same way our parents did with us.'

I collected this dialogue between father and son after a communal Friday prayer when families gather in their courtyard for lunch. It highlights how elders and youths in Bougouni differentiate in terms of the qualities of the epochs in which they grew up. By 'education', Moussa referred to the transformation of the field of possibilities and life trajectories for present-day young people compared to the epoch of his youth. The arrival of modern technologies and the development of mobility brought significant changes to people's life in town. Youth have easier access to the wider world and all its influences. Nowadays, urban youth aspire to jobs other than the traditional farming activities of their elders. These recent transformations make elders think of the youth as a distinct 'generational unit' (see Mannheim

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<sup>355</sup> For illustrations of the meanings of the management of age as shifting and relative criteria in men's circle at weddings and funerals in Botswana, see Durham (2004, 593-594).

<sup>356</sup> See [http://www.ase-bougouni.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=154:jeune-chambre-internationale&catid=148:jeunes-entrepreneurs&Itemid=210](http://www.ase-bougouni.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=154:jeune-chambre-internationale&catid=148:jeunes-entrepreneurs&Itemid=210) (retrieved the 4 December 2011).

1952) shaped by a specific contemporaneity. Urban youth is meaningfully labelled '*Génération Jakarta*' by their elders in Mali (see chapter 5). In addition to material symbols, this contemporaneity is often associated with a particular period of changes which emerged after the events of 1991.

L'AEEM (*Association des élèves et des étudiants du Mali*), a student trade union founded in 1990, was strongly involved in the demonstrations which triggered the coup d'état of 26 March 1991. Many young Malians were among the 200 dead and 1000 wounded people, casualties of the violent repression ordered by Moussa Traoré in response to the peaceful demonstrations of 21 and 22 January 1991 in Bamako. In its aftermath, and by virtue of their sacrifice for democracy and freedom, Malian youth emerged as an important force in civil contestation, and intimidating as activists as well. The events of 1991 helped to build a generational cohort of youth which differs from earlier ones because it is the first properly postcolonial generation to become self-conscious of its weight in Malian society.

Although most political offices in Mali are still in the hands of the elders, as power holders, they cannot reach national reputation unless they receive support from younger generations, as has recently been illustrated in the power contest between the military junta led by Captain Sanogo and ECOWAS<sup>357</sup> after the coup d'état of 22 March 2012. ECOWAS had difficulty intervening politically in Mali to make Dioncounda Traoré (the head of Mali's national assembly) the effective interim President of Mali because of regular demonstrations on the streets of Bamako by youths who supported Captain Sanogo and opposed foreign intrusion in Malian politics.

According to many elders I met in Bougouni, the events of 1991 were a turning point in intergenerational relationships in Mali; elders' authority decreased while the freedom of youths increased. As one elder expressed it 'the youth think they can do whatever they want now!' This youth empowerment is not confined to civil contestation. In this chapter I consider the increasing weight of youth cultural practices and ideas of modernity in the shaping of conceptions of proper Muslim life in Mali.

Malians often identify their generation with the political regimes under which they grew up. In 2009 being young meant growing up under the liberal and democratic regime of post-1991 Mali. By contrast, many older people relate their epoch to the single party regimes of Modibo Keita and Moussa Traoré. In this way, youths and elders tend to be marked by a different 'spirit of times' (see Durham 2004, 592) and these generational imprints can clash, such as the controversy about musical *zikiri* in Mali illustrates.

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<sup>357</sup> The Economic Community of West African States.

## ***Zikiri performances during Maouloud 2010 in Bamako***

From 24 February 2010 to 5 March 2010 I attended the ten day *Ansar Dine* gathering for the celebration of Maouloud 2010 in Bamako.<sup>358</sup> For many participants, the climax of this religious event was the three mass-gatherings of Muslims that took place in the Modibo Keita Stadium. Haïdara gave a first public sermon there for the celebration of the birth of the Prophet during the evening; a second nocturnal sermon 7 days later for the baptism of the Prophet; and a final mass-blessing the afternoon following the previous public sermon. The annual celebration of the Maouloud in Bamako has become the most important *Ansar Dine* meeting where members of all *sections* come together next to their 'spiritual guide' for what they call a 'pilgrimage'. Being present three times in ten days in the devotional crowd of 40,000 people packed into the Modibo Keita Stadium during Haïdara's public interventions gave me an impressive insight into the power of Haïdara and *Ansar Dine* in contemporary Mali.<sup>359</sup> Moussa, a friend critical of Haïdara, nonetheless acknowledged his popularity by saying 'Haïdara manages to fill the Stadium several times in one week when soccer does not!' The fact that Haïdara's meetings seemed more popular than soccer particularly drew his attention.<sup>360</sup> Haïdara had become a powerful religious actor and a prominent personality in Mali's public life.<sup>361</sup>

In-between these three mass-gatherings many activities happened in the popular district of Bankoni around the residence of Haïdara. During the ten days the area hosted thousands of Muslims. Streets were transformed into a sort of religious festival articulated around communal prayers, general meetings of *Ansar Dine*,<sup>362</sup> and visits to arrays of shops selling religious items. Various entertainment activities also happened. The *Programme Maouloud 2010* distributed at the headquarters of *Ansar Dine* invited '*les pèlerins*' (the pilgrims) to various events such as theatre, Karate and two nights of '*Animation (Zikri)*'. I

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<sup>358</sup> Thanks to the help of members of the *Ansar Dine* section of Bougouni, the head office of *Ansar Dine* in Bamako gave me a pass as a member of the *Ansar Dine* International delegation which facilitated fieldwork on the various sites of this Muslim gathering.

<sup>359</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> celebration of Maouloud in the Modibo Keita Stadium unfortunately ended in a dramatic stampede in 2011. 36 people were killed and more than 60 injured by being crushed against metal fencing as they waited to leave at the end of the final gathering in the Stadium. When Malian newspapers denounced the bad organisation of the security forces (Policemen and *Ansar* volunteers), Haïdara's opponents interpreted this dramatic stampede as a warning from God towards *Ansar Dine* and Haïdara's un-Islamic activities (personal conversations). On Malian newspapers, see websites above: <http://www.journaldumali.com/article.php?aid=2804>, <http://www.bamanet.net/index.php/actualite/independant/13252-maouloud-meurtrier-au-stade-omnisports-de-bamako-letat-les-forces-de-securite-et-lassociation-ancardine-responsables-.html>, <http://www.essor.ml/societe/article/maouloud-2011-bousculade-meurtiere>, (retrieved the 24.11.2011).

<sup>360</sup> Some years previously Schulz already wrote: 'Wherever he [Haïdara] goes in Mali, he draws masses of followers and admirers that outnumber by far the crowd that the former president Alpha Konaré attracted during his visits' (2003, 156).

<sup>361</sup> As a negative illustration of this, Haïdara did not make a public statement about the unpopular *Nouveau Code de la Famille* (see conclusion of chapter 3) that was interpreted as a threat to male authority by many ordinary Muslims. Haïdara's silence was criticised by many friends as tacit support for *Le Nouveau Code de la Famille*. They expected such a prominent religious and public figure to give his opinion when a national debate related to Islam arises.

<sup>362</sup> See *Programme Maouloud 2010* in Appendix 2.

decided to attend what I refer to as *zikiri* performances because many young Muslims of Bougouni listened to them.



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*Zikiri* performances (like the other entertainment events) took place in a vast space which stretched right of the end of the main street of Bankoni to the foot of the hills surrounding Bamako. During the Maouloud this public square hosted a market of religious paraphernalia, parking for the numerous coaches of *Ansar Dine's* various national and international delegations, and an open space where entertainment events took place. I arrived there early at night. *Zikiri* performances had not started yet, but a crowd of young Muslims and children were already standing or sitting in circles on gendered lines; females on one side, males in the other side. A space was left empty at the centre of the arena. Two big neon tubes fixed to an off-centred post lighted the gathering of Muslims. Next to it, two people sitting at a table were operating music through mixing tables and micros. The crowd waited calmly while listening to *zikiriw* coming out of loudspeakers set in strategic sonorous locations. One of the religious singers I had met in the afternoon invited me to sit where all religious singers gathered.

The whole place quickly became packed. *Zikiri* performances started. Masters of ceremonies invited religious singers one by one by name to perform one of their *Zikiriw*. Music was turned on and, religious singers successively took up a microphone, moved to the centre of the arena and performed. The ambiance became animated. The crowd responded to the music by clapping hands, moving their body in a dancing mode and by repeating lyrics. The

<sup>363</sup> Photograph 20: shop selling *Zikiri*-cassettes located next to the space where *zikiri* performances took place.

popularity of each performer and the quality of each performance could be gauged from the intensity of the sensual and emotive response of the crowd; the atmosphere was relaxed, joyful and warm.

When masters of ceremonies announced the arrival of Nouhoum Dembélé on stage, the crowd became highly charged. Some listeners behaved like pop star fans at the sight of Nouhoum Dembélé. Security volunteers had difficulty keeping the centre of the arena clear when many excited fans rushed to dance next to Nouhoum Dembélé. Performing a song called '*kira kanu be an na*' (May the love of the Prophet be with us), Nouhoum Dembélé inflamed the crowd. Joy, happiness and excitement emanated from young Muslims and children's faces. Everybody participated in the remembrance of the Prophet led by Nouhoum Dembélé in a variety of sensual and emotional manners: some repeat lyrics and clap hands while sitting; others stand up and dance energetically. After his show, photographers took pictures of Nouhoum Dembélé with fans. *Zikiri* performances continued until late in the night in a pleasant and lively atmosphere punctuated by moments of intense emotion brought on by the most popular *zikiriw*.

In similar vein to what happened in Egyptian Islamic *Mawlid*s described by Samuli Schielke (2001), *zikiri* performances are about 'pious fun'. By contrast to Schielke, I do not however explain the pious fun generated by *zikiri* performances in terms of particular moments when the sacred and the profane are closely connected; religious singers and their audience do not perceive *zikiri* performances as a melting of paradoxical dimensions; for them, the so-called '*zikiri*' is about living on this mundane world with faith and love of Islam, the Prophet and God in their heart.

'Zikiri today is about cultivating love in people's heart.'<sup>364</sup>

'Zikiri is about bringing out God's calmness.'<sup>365</sup>

According to religious singers I met there,<sup>366</sup> the musical way they perform *zikiriw* started in the eighties shortly after the foundation of *Ansar Dine*. Ibrahim Diallo and Ablaye Djiré were among the first religious singers to follow Haïdara. They paved the way for the current dozens of religious singers who now sing the 'love' (*kanu*) and 'praise' (*tanu*) of God, the Prophet and his descendants such as Haïdara.<sup>367</sup> Apart from the Maouloud, they perform *zikiriw* during

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<sup>364</sup> *Zikiri bi ce n'est ka sene kanu mogu dusu kono* (Souleymane Diarra, religious singer).

<sup>365</sup> *Zikiri yé Ala ko suma de kama* (Hamadou Barry, religious singer).

<sup>366</sup> Souleymane Diarra, Hamadou Barry and Sidy Coulibaly Ba. A minority of religious singers are women (e.g. Mama Sangaré).

<sup>367</sup> The patronym Haïdara indicates sharifan descent in this case. Like numerous Muslim scholars of West Africa, Haïdara strengthens his religious authority by claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad.

baptisms, religious and civil weddings and ‘greetings’<sup>368</sup> (*ka fɔli kɛ*), and produce *zikiri*-cassettes now found in most Malian markets. While most of them work besides being a religious singer, a few of them managed to become professional religious singers. In 2010, the *Ansar Dine* association of religious singers was working on setting up their own recording studio.

‘Uttering *zikiri* has existed from the creation of the Word until today. It is an ancient practice (...) Playing guitar on it is something new, but it is not forbidden. Its usage is not forbidden. But if you do it wrongly, you are responsible for that. If you do it rightly, guitar and song are not forbidden. Music does not harm religion. What is important is the way you do it; nothing more (...) Muslim women and Muslim men also dance; it does not matter. However if this activity make you forgetful, you should not do it.’<sup>369</sup>

For religious singers and their audience, ‘dance’ (*dɔn*) and ‘music’ (*donkili*) are accepted in Islam. Referring to Haïdara’s teaching on the importance of having a correct attitude in life, what matters is not dance and music *per se*, but the attitude of people involved in these activities.

‘*Zikiri* is about calling people to Islam. After performing if you realise people still do not have faith in Islam, and their heart is not filled with the desire for Islam, you can say *zikiri* did not work.’<sup>370</sup>

For members of *Ansar Dine*, a Muslim with the correct attitude to life does not take *zikiri* as a mere entertainment; listening to *zikiri* nurtures his or her ‘desire’ (*nege*) for and ‘faith’ (*limanyia*) in Islam. Music, dance and lyrics of *zikiri* call people to Islam by filling their ‘heart’ (*dusu*) with the ‘love’ (*kanu*) of God, the Prophet and his descendants. In this way, the sensuality and the musicality of the so-called ‘*zikiri*’ transformed its ‘recollection with the tongue’ into a kind of ‘recollection in the heart’ present in Sufi tradition (Schimmel 1976). The aim of *zikiri* is also about ‘getting closer to God’ (*ka hakili jigin Ala la*) through pious emotions and feelings. By contrast, people who conceive of *zikiri* as mere forgetful activity do so because they lack faith in Islam and the correct attitude towards life. Their religiosity is based on wrong intentions.

<sup>368</sup> Greetings mean when a religious singer is invited to perform a concert.

<sup>369</sup> *Zikiri da te ko kura yé depuis kuma be fɔ bi. Ko kɔɔ de don (...). Gitarwɔn olu yé ko kura yé. Fɛn dɔ be haramu tɛ. Haramu tɛ a kɔɔ quoi. Mais ni ɛ yé ka a kɛ ka cɛn, ɛ de be o kɛ ka cɛnba yé. Ni ɛ yé ka kɛ ka jɛ, haramu tɛ gitarwɔn ani fɔli yé a kɔɔ. A tɛ diine cɛn. Mais ɛ ka a ka cogo don. A bana (...). Silamɛ muso and silamɛ kɛ, olu fɛnɛ be dɔn kɛ. O tɛ baasi yé. Nka a ka a kɛ i ka damunu kono dɔɔn I kana dɔn son.* (Sidy Coulibaly Ba, religious singer).

<sup>370</sup> *Ni ɛ yé zikiri da ka ban ka sɔɔ mogow ma se ka limanyia sɔɔ ka na silameya la, walima ale ma se ka mogow dusu sɔɔ ka Ala ko nege don mogow la, ɛ be a fɔ ko zikiri ma mogow jia* (Hamadou Barry, religious singer).

Another important aspect of *zikiri* mentioned by religious singers is its praising dimension (*ka mɔɔɔ tɔɔɔ fɔ*). *Zikiri* lyrics praise ‘God’ (*Ala*), ‘the Prophet’ (*kira*) and ‘his descendants’ (*kira somogow*). Apart from God and the Prophet, religious singers of *Ansar Dine* especially praise Muhammad’s descendant Cherif Ousmane Madani Haïdara. Sidy Coulibaly Ba is among religious singers who closely follow Haïdara.

‘I have accompanied Haïdara on his travels for more than 10 years now. All Haïdara’s big achievements I witnessed, I put them into cassettes so as to let people know his success in the world (...). In Mali, people do not speak about your work until you die. If you die, words said over your grave will not point at what you really achieved in life because people have not seen all. If you have achieved great works in life, someone has to say it to people’.<sup>371</sup>

Following Haïdara’s life, and witnessing and remembrance of his achievements, bring to mind the bard tradition (*griots*) of Mande culture.<sup>372</sup> The “praising dimension” (*ka mɔɔɔ tɔɔɔ fɔ*)<sup>373</sup> of *zikiri* refers to longstanding traditions of praise singers and bards’ families affiliated to nobles and kings of pre-colonial Mande society. By following Sharif Haïdara and praising his deeds to his followers and beyond, the religious singers behave like *griots*; they are a sort of Muslim bard of the contemporary Mande world. They help build the renown of Haïdara and shape his heroic narration as a saint.<sup>374</sup> Religious singers constitute one of the means through which Haïdara promotes himself and his Muslim association to the youth and beyond.

### ***The sensual reasoning of Zikiri***

I took note of musical *zikiriw* within the first months of my stay in Bougouni when I was searching for contacts outside my host families in *grins* and shops edging the streets of the town. At the very beginning of my fieldwork my *Bamanan* skills were poor; hence I had difficulty in differentiating *zikiri* from other local music because both sound like contemporary

<sup>371</sup> *C’est plus de dix ans, an be voyagé. Ni Haïdara be taa voyagé, an be taa ɲɔɲɔn fɛ. Ni ɛ yé min yé min a yé min kɛ ; a yé baara bababa mun de kɛ monde kɔɲɔ, ɛ yere yé min yé min ka di ɲɛna, ɛ be o bla caseti kɔɲɔ ka a fɔ mogow yé (...). An fɛ, farafina mogo tɛ fɔ i ka baara la fɔ ni ɛ sara. Ni ɛ sara, kuma min o sɔɔɔ kat fari da i kaburu kan, o tɛ foyi ɲɛ. Ni ɛ yé baara kɛ, a kan ka fɔ mogo ka dɔ yé min kɛ* (Sidy Coulibaly Ba, religious singer).

<sup>372</sup> Sidy Coulibaly Ba does not come from a *griot* family.

<sup>373</sup> Literally, ‘to say the name of someone.’

<sup>374</sup> On illustration of *zikiri* as praise of Haïdara, listen to ‘Cherifou’ of Dembele (2009).



Malian music to me. In the course of time I learnt the names of the principal religious singers and I became better able to identify the religious register shaping the lyrics of *zikiriw*.

Youths listened to *zikiriw* through mobile phones and radios in *grins*, courtyards and coaches (...). Housemaids turned on the radio and hummed them to themselves while doing household chores within courtyards. Drivers of the *Banimonitié* coach company regularly put *zikiri* cassettes into the radio-cassette player during the journey from Bougouni to Bamako. Numerous youth Muslims I met in Bougouni loaded *zikiriw* onto their mobile phones and stored them next to the songs of Tiken Jah Fakoly, Celine Dion, Nahawa Doumbia and other African and Western musicians.<sup>375</sup> They listened to them at any time and at any place, but I mainly heard *zikiriw* in *grins*.

Once, I found my friends Ali and Oumar dancing joyfully to *zikiriw* next to the workshop of Salif the tailor. The radio was broadcasting a *zikiri* the main chorus of which was 'If you love God, you quieten down; if we are together, we quieten down'.<sup>376</sup> Ali the hairdresser and Oumar the carter, both in their mid-twenties, enjoyed listening to *zikiriw* because they taught them about Islam in an entertaining manner. When a *zikiri* moved them particularly, they sometimes express their emotions by dancing on them. When I hailed him 'the Imam Haïdara', Oumar directly corrected me 'No, Haïdara is a *karamɔɔɔ*!' For him, Haïdara does more than leading the prayer as the Imam does; he is an authentic Muslim scholar (*karamɔɔɔ*) who teaches people the right Islamic attitude to adopt in life.<sup>377</sup>

In general, the entertaining and educational character of *zikiriw* I found among the youth of Bougouni resonates with listening to sermon tapes as 'pious relaxation' in Cairo illustrated in the book *The Ethical Soundscape* written by the anthropologist Charles Hirschkind (2006). Listening to *zikiriw* as pious relaxation that I observed among young Muslims in Bougouni refers more to Ahmad's conception of sensual and emotional listening than it does to Hisham's conception of 'listening with attention' (*al-insat*);<sup>378</sup> when Hisham disagrees with listening to sermon tapes for entertainment, Ahmad stated that the entertaining character of sermon tapes is acceptable as long as it allows listening to them with 'a sensitive heart filled with humility and faith' (Hirschkind 2006, 70). The listening to *zikiriw* I observed in everyday

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<sup>375</sup> In similar vein, they juxtaposed pictures of Barack Obama, Didier Drogba (for instances) and Qur'anic verses with, as one of my friends states, 'pictures of good weather' (*images du beau temps*) that are naked women in their mobile phone memory.

<sup>376</sup> *Ni ɛ bɛ Ala fɛ, ɛ bɛ sabali. Ni anw bɛ ɲɔɲɔn fɛ, anw bɛ sabali.*

<sup>377</sup> It is noteworthy that Haïdara's sermons convinced most young and ordinary Muslims of the authenticity and the depth of his knowledge of Islam, while many Muslim scholars criticised Haïdara for his poor knowledge of Islam; they referred to the fact that Haïdara did not receive extensive formal religious training in Mali or in the Arabic world. Haïdara indeed attended *médersa* in Segou until grade six only. He later pursued in his studies in a high school in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), but he never completed it. He returned to Mali at the age of 17 and began his 'preaching career'. Haïdara professes to be a 'self-taught' Muslim scholar (see Kimberley 2002, 130-132); a book written by a follower of Haïdara mentioned that Haïdara attended two years of *duguma kalan* in the village of Tamani, six years of *médersa* in Segou and four other years of Islamic learning in the locality of Fasongo (see Traore 2007, 5).

<sup>378</sup> Ahmad and Hisham are Hirschkind's informants.

life in Bougouni relates religious experience to ‘the anthropology of sensual reason’ put forward by Hirschkind in the introduction to his book (Ibid, 28-31). Like him, I observed that for many young Muslims in Bougouni, the ethical aspects of *zikiri* are motivated by the affects and sensibilities they arouse within them.<sup>379</sup>

Seibou, a young civil servant working in Bougouni, regularly visited a *grin* after work where he listened to *zikiriw* on his mobile phone while chatting with friends and waiting for dinner time to go home. Sometimes a *zikiri* moved him particularly. He then started rocking a bit on his chair in a dancing mode, humming the lyrics of the *zikiri* to himself and, as I explain below, silently reflecting upon his life. Once I dared to interrupt him during such an emotional moment to ask him about the experience of listening to *zikiri* a moment earlier. He explained to me that he was simply moved by the *zikiri* of Mohamed Diaby coming from his mobile phone. He got hooked by its main chorus, ‘life is empty’ (*dunya yé fu yé*). He then told about the thoughts brought to mind by this *zikiri*.

“‘Life is empty’ means that running after mobiles, motorbikes, cars and cement houses is not the main thing in life. You should rather take care of your *conscience* and work hard. The rest is nothing. The Prophet and Haïdara said that life is nothing unless for practising *la bonté* (goodness).’

By ‘*dunya*’ Seibou referred to desires and worries coming from the mundane world. At that precise moment, Seibou was under pressure financially. He had to gather money to finance his upcoming wedding and complete construction of the house he would like to move into with his future wife. At the same time, as the oldest son of the family, he had to take care of his ageing parents and support the studies of his younger brothers. Life circumstances bound him to constraints and expectations emerging from the mundane world; the struggle for earthly achievements sometimes brought moral lapses in his life and made him forgetful of God. Here, listening to *zikiriw* helped Yaya to stand back from the flow of life thanks to its relaxing receptivity which, at the same time, moved his *conscience* and opened him to self-scrutiny.<sup>380</sup> In this case, listening to *zikiriw* is about leaving the mundane behind for a while, refocusing on the pious desire for God, reminding oneself of the practice of goodness and, at the same time, reflecting on his life. As religious singers and their audience illustrated in the previous section, the so-called ‘*zikiri*’ is about living in this mundane world while cultivating the faith and love of

<sup>379</sup> For a similar analysis of the power of sound and music as conditions of ethical action among Muslim men in northern Pakistan, see Marsden (2007b).

<sup>380</sup> Charles Hirschkind similarly wrote about taxi drivers listening to sermon tapes while driving for hours in Cairo’s maddening traffic: ‘The tape produces in those already rightly disposed the sensorially rich experience of *inshirah* - the Quranic concept referring to the opening of the heart that accompanies drawing near to God - and in doing so, allows one to better meet the stress and monotony of urban labor’ (2006, 72).

God in people's heart. The ethical aspect of *zikiri* is motivated by the affects and sensibilities it raises within its listeners. For many young Muslims, the musicality of *zikiri* does not make them forgetful of God. On the contrary, listening to *zikiri* activates their religious sensibilities that, in turn, incite them to ethical reasoning upon their life and this mundane world.<sup>381</sup>

From the vibrant performance of Nouhoum Dembelé during Maouloud 2010 in Bamako which filled the crowd with the desire of God, to the self-scrutiny of Seibou arising when he was listening to a *zikiri* of Mohamed Diaby on mobile phone, these small ethnographies of *zikiri* demonstrate that sound and music are powerful mediums through which faith is cultivated and ethical thinking is conceived by young Muslims in Mali. Among them, many are sympathisers of the best-known promoter of musical *zikiri*, Mali's most popular religious leader, Cherif Ousmane Madani Haïdara, the founder and spiritual guide of the powerful *Ansar Dine* Muslim association.

### ***Being a young Muslim and sympathiser of Haïdara in Bougouni***

Like Nigérien youth, young Muslims in Mali conceive of religion as 'an integral part of their cultural identity' even if they do not practise it fully (Masquelier 2010, 226).<sup>382</sup> They also follow a kind of 'pragmatic' Islam in which 'ethical behaviour is *situational* rather than immutable'; as when a young Nigérien wore an allegedly un-Islamic baseball cap as 'protection against the sun'(Masquelier 2007, 252); or when Adama, a young Muslim labourer settled in Bougouni, sometimes drank a cup of local 'palm wine' (*banji*) after lunchtime because '*banji* is not an alcohol; it is a medicine which warms you up and gives you strength'. Many young Muslims engage with sectarian distinctions in a similar pragmatic way with regard to the ongoing religious pluralisation of Islam in Mali.

'Some Muslim scholars cause us worries concerning Paradise. For instance, some of them said that TV, radio and pictures are un-Islamic. Their view of Islam makes life very complicated and this especially with the new technologies. Haïdara is not like that' (Mamadou, 29 years old, engineer in Bougouni).

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<sup>381</sup> The Lyrics of songs promote intellectual life and this is particularly true with illiterate people. The wife of Boubacar, the seller of cloth, did not have the opportunity to go to school. Every Friday evening she watched the TV programme *Top Etoiles* on ORTM in which musical clips of Malian artists were broadcast. She especially appreciated when Malian artists spoke about difficulties they had encountered in their lives. She could then associate with their lyrics which made her 'reflect' (*miiri*) about her own life. In this way, it helped her to create new 'ideas' (*hakili*) in her mind so as to move forward in life.

<sup>382</sup> For a longer version of this chapter, see Masquelier (2007).

Like Mamadou, young Muslims in Mali want to use technologies, resources and trends available in their own era without facing moral dilemma. Therefore, scholarly attention to youth should be related not only to 'potential forms of resistance and opposition' to public order, but also to their aspiration to live in 'conformity' with their epoch (see Amit and Dyck 2012, 10). In this regard, the youth of Bougouni appreciate Muslim scholars who attempt to adapt Islam to novelties characterising their epoch instead of castigate them as un-Islamic.

The process of religious pluralisation within Islam in Mali is in itself ancient; in early colonial times, Islam was so disparate that Muslims struggled to standardise their religious practices so as to gather into the same community (see the formation of a generic Islam, chapter 2). Muslims remained divided into multiple Sufi allegiances (e.g. Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya, Hamawiyya) during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, reformist movements of Arabic influence became influential in Mali from late colonial times until the 1980s. In the 1990s new religious movements, such as *Ansar Dine* Muslim association founded by Cherif Ousmane Madani Haïdara, emerged and became especially popular among the Malian youth. Whereas the process of religious pluralisation has been continuous in Mali, its nature has been subject to ever-changing contemporaneous features. In line with Maud and Mayrargue (2011, 19), I argue that the process of religious pluralisation in Mali partially reflects the variety of the majority of ordinary Muslims themselves, the youth, whose way of life is at odds with the discourses and practices of their elders. In this regard, the success of these new movements is due not only to recent liberalisation, freedom of association and new media of communication found in contemporary Mali, but also to the fact that they mirror youth's aspirations.<sup>383</sup>

The majority of young Muslims I met in Bougouni were sympathisers<sup>384</sup> of Cherif Ousmane Madani Haïdara. They appreciated Haïdara for various reasons, among which his emphasis on the 'correct attitude' (*jogo numan*) to have in life (prior to the practice of Islamic precepts *per se*) is one of the most widely shared. Haïdara used to base *jogo numan* on the practice of the six Islamic promises (*baya*) that I explained in chapter 2. Often people translated *jogo* into the French word '*intention*' because, according to Haïdara's teaching, there is no correct attitude without correct intention: they are two sides of the same coin. How can a prayer be valid, if a Muslim performs it while constantly thinking about un-Islamic matters? asked Haïdara. He commonly illustrated *jogo numan* with everyday life anecdotes which connote, above all, a situational precept whose precise reading relies on a given context. Therefore, young Muslims perceived Haïdara's teaching more as a compass which indicates

<sup>383</sup> For similar analysis of the insertion of youth culture into a Sufi branch of Cheick Soufi Bilal in Mali, see Soares (2007).

<sup>384</sup> In Mali, enormous numbers of people approve of Haïdara's teachings without being members of *Ansar Dine*; they are his sympathisers (see Kimberley 2002, 141).

the right direction to take in life than a mould applied in people's life. Criticising the rigorous dogmatism of numerous Muslim scholars, Mamadou followed Haïdara's teaching because it allows him to practise his two passions (soccer and internet) freely as well as to relativise breaches in the practice of a generic Islam. Indeed, Haïdara invites Muslims to perform the five daily prayers and to fast during the holy month of Ramadan. However, at the same time he warns them that any prayer done by a Muslim without following the correct attitude in life is invalid.

'Haïdara said that being Muslim does not necessarily mean praying. People usually said the fact that you go to the mosque and you pray there make you Muslim. Haïdara disagrees with that. For Haïdara, what matters first is having a good attitude in life. At the beginning of the life of the Prophet, the prayer did not exist' (Mamadou, 29 years old, engineer in Bougouni).

Haïdara's sensitisation of Islam as a set of moral guidance prior to any dogmatic practice seduces Malian youth due to the pragmatic approach and flexible reading it confers on the quotidian; in this way Islam becomes more a personal choice based on someone's '*conscience*' (or *jogo*, intention) than, according to a young carpenter, a 'straitjacket made of obligations'. Many young Muslims thought the so-called 'Wahhabis' promoted a constraining Islam that includes a strict dress code and haircut in public. They preferred Haïdara's flexible approach to outward appearance and often stated one of his famous slogans about the wrongdoings of such reformist movements: 'God does not need people's beards; God simply needs people.'<sup>385</sup> Following Haïdara's teaching, my friends would just say that people are free to follow Islamic dress code and style, but this does not make them more (or genuine) Muslim. In similar vein, young Muslims liked Haïdara's teaching because it does not linger on doctrinal issue such as illustrated in the controversy about the manner of praying which divided Malian Muslims for decades.

'When Muslim scholars disputed for years about the correct hand position during prayer, Haïdara resolved it in two sentences! Whether you pray with arms crossed or with arms hanging by the sides, it does not matter. What matters is the intention you put in your prayer. That is it' (Kader, 27 years old, radio host in Bougouni).

As implied in earlier quotation of Mamadou, for Haïdara's sympathisers, his teaching also is rooted in the life of the Prophet, however, in a way different from that proposed in other

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<sup>385</sup> *Ala mago te mɔɔ si la. Ala mago be mɔɔ la dɔɔn.*

movements. Haïdara disagrees with the *sirawo* who strive hard to live in the same material conditions than the Prophet; Haïdara also disagrees with reformist movements which propose scriptural interpretations of the life of the Prophet which consistently seek to encapsulate Muslim life into a set of written norms (see the pluralisation of Islam in Bougouni, chapter 2). Haïdara reads the life of the Prophet as a religious path with successive stages that the Prophet himself underwent. For him, knowing God was prior to worshipping God in the life of the Prophet. Muslims should first build their faith in Islam by learning about God instead of praying in ignorance.

In the increasing religious pluralisation occurring in Mali, Haïdara's marketing of religion puts forward an Islam that considers the youth as 'being in their own right' instead of 'human becoming' (Herrera 2010, 129) or 'not "real" Muslims' (Masquelier 2010, 226), such as stressed by most Muslim scholars who portray youth as immature people who neglect daily prayers and fasting. In other words, Haïdara's teachings apprehend youths as fully-engaged religious actors whose preoccupations, worldly aspirations and way of life do not necessarily hinder Muslim life.

'Before Islam was only about *la toiture* (roof) and not *les soubassements* (basement)! (...) Islam was done only for elders. Cherif international [<sup>386</sup>] Madani Häidara brought us the basement of Islam. Thanks to him many young people practice Islam now. Most of my knowledge of Islam I got it from his cassette-sermons' (Kader, 27 years old, radio host in Bougouni).

By '*soubassements*' Kader pointed out that Haïdara's sermons has rendered Islam accessible to all by making Islamic practice less dependent on the Islamic knowledge of Muslim scholars. Indeed, Haïdara considerably undermined the power of those who know and teach Arabic language by stipulating everyone should be able to pray in his own language (instead of Arabic). He also criticised the increasing cost of life-cycle ceremonies in Mali by stressing the greed of Muslim scholars involved in baptism and wedding. For him, customs around these life-cycle ceremonies should not be hindered by expense if they want to be label as Islamic; he advised ordinary Muslims, either to avoid taking 'credits' (*juruw*) and to give Muslim scholars only what they can afford, or simply to utter appropriate *sura* by themselves. These interventions potentially undermined the control of the religious elite over life-cycle ceremonies; they also gave more authority to ordinary Muslims in the performance of these ceremonies. As a young civil servant said 'Haïdara has opened the envelope'; in similar vein a

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<sup>386</sup> *Ansar Dine* was present in 24 countries (mostly in West Africa and the *Bamanan*-speaking diaspora in the Western world) in 2010. The international success of Haïdara was regularly stressed by young Muslims as another component of his legitimacy as a religious authority. In this increasingly global world, many Haïdara's sympathisers proudly added 'international' to his name.

young carpenter stated that 'Haïdara broke the myth of Islam' because what Muslim scholars have kept secret about Islam for decades, such as the necessary sura for the performing of life-cycle ceremonies, is now becoming available to all.

Haïdara also managed to gain the sympathy of numerous illiterate Muslims by explaining Islam in clear, simple, concrete and 'humorous' (*tulon*) stories in *Bamanankan*. Fousseini, an illiterate Malian from a village near Segou, worked as *wɔtɔɔtigi* (carter) and fisherman in Bougouni. When he came across a sermon of Haïdara broadcast on local radio, he turned up the volume and enjoyed it.<sup>387</sup> Once we were fishing on his boat in the river *Ba* next to Bougouni. He was fiddling with his radio. When he found Haïdara's sermon, he turned up the volume and listened carefully to it. From time to time, his stillness was punctuated by a laugh, a smile and an expression of joy and agreement such as '*kojugu*', '*eh Ala!*', '*Haïdara!*' The sermon was about the goodness and swiftness of God:

*A Muslim man was walking on the street and holding a bottle full of alcohol in his hand, when he was stopped by a group of angry Muslims armed with staffs. They wanted to check the content of his bottle so as to know whether the guy was drinking alcohol or not. The holder of the illicit bottle panicked. He silently begged God to change the content of his bottle. He promised God to never drink alcohol again if God would intervene in his favour. When the group of angry Muslims opened the bottle they discovered vinegar in it! The guy no longer drank alcohol and became a devoted Muslim (summary of Haïdara's sermon).*

When the sermon ended, Fousseini laughed loudly and said '*Ala ka teli kojugu!*' (God is too rapid!). As Fousseini suggests, Haïdara's illustrative teaching style appeals to numerous young Muslims because it educates people about Islam in a joyful, humorous and playful manner.

Indeed, Haïdara is known as a gifted orator and the most flamboyant Muslim media star of Mali who has managed to garner considerable public attention, not only by telling entertaining stories, but also by pronouncing provocative public statements towards the elite (see Soares 2004, 218). Haïdara's popularity among the youth is also linked to his defiant opposition towards the military dictatorship of Moussa Traoré and the elite in general. He was sent to jail three times for his open criticism of the regime of Moussa Traoré. He was also known for denouncing the general state of corruption and hypocrisy of the Malian elite. His

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<sup>387</sup> The four radio stations of Bougouni broadcast 11.5 hours of Islamic programmes every week in 2009-2010. 5.5 hours of Haïdara's sermons and 1 hour of musical *zikiriw* were broadcast every week. Here Haïdara and his religious singers accounted for 56.5% of all Islamic radio programmes in Bougouni, whereas all the other Muslim currents accounted for only 43.5% of them.

inclination to speak loudly what ordinary Malians thought silently about the drift into venality of the elite built his nickname of 'the one who says the truth' (*cenfola*).<sup>388</sup>

### ***When 'old things' meet 'new things'***

The regular practice of Islam in Mali was originally associated with elders; those whom people call 'old man' (*cekɔɔba*) and 'old woman' (*musokɔɔba*). Their greater devotional practice, compared to younger generations, was motivated by acquiring social status and respectability in the local community, and by accumulating 'religious awards' (*baraji*) in order to prepare for death as the unavoidable gate towards the Day of Judgement.<sup>389</sup> In 2003 a young man in the village of Dioumaténé in south Mali who ignored prayer times, jokingly argued with me, 'Islam is for those who are tangling with the grave'. While his comment still holds some truth, elders in Bougouni pointed out to me that the youth of today practises Islam more intensively than during the epoch of Moussa Traoré (1968-1991).

The increasing engagement of youth with Islam in Mali is mainly due to: the progressive development of *médersas*<sup>390</sup> during the postcolonial period, the post-1991 formation of a generic Islam in public life (see chapter 2), and, most importantly for this chapter, the proliferation of small media (see Eickelmann and Anderson 2003). According to Schulz 'the diffusion of religious knowledge on broadcast media (...) contributes to a process of objectivation in the course of which "religion" becomes the object of individual scrutiny and identity construction' (2003, 146). New forms of religious experiences and sociability have been brought into being by media technologies (Schulz 2003; 2006b; 2007). In consequence, Islam has become more accessible to the illiterate and to women in Mali. Similarly, the numerous *Zikiri*-cassettes found in local markets have enabled the increasing engagement of the youth with Islam.

In the course of my sojourn in Bougouni I noticed elders did not listen to *zikiriw*; a few among them listened to Arabic cassettes of recitations of Qur'an instead. By contrast to local youth, most elders did not miss daily prayers in the mosque.<sup>391</sup> Knowing I was undertaking a study of

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<sup>388</sup> However, many regret what they call the '*embourgeoisement*' of Haïdara they started noticing after 2000. Success, they claim, has softened Haïdara's critical positions towards the state and the elite (see chapter 2). Others simply stated, 'Haïdara became one of them'.

<sup>389</sup> On a similar relation between ageing and devotional Islamic practice among the Tuareg in Niger, see Rasmussen (2000).

<sup>390</sup> On the development of *médersas* in Mali, see Brenner (2001).

<sup>391</sup> Young women in Mali do not pray in the mosque except during the communal prayers for the celebrations of the end of Ramadan and the *Aïd el Kebir*. Old women start praying regularly in the mosque after the menopause.



Islam in Bougouni, the President of the local AMUPI<sup>392</sup> encouraged me to visit all the local mosques of Bougouni shortly after our first meeting. I accepted to do so as part of my integration into the Muslim society of Bougouni. After three months in Bougouni I had carried out more than 30 open group-interviews with Muslims attending local mosques.<sup>393</sup> As these meetings were held in the courtyards of mosques right after prayer times on days of the week other than Friday, my interlocutors were mostly Muslims who prayed diligently at the mosque: the elders of Bougouni. At that time, I was working with a young fieldwork assistant who was especially curious to know what elders and Imams of the town thought about the *zikiriw* he listened to with his friends in *grins*. I therefore encouraged his initiative of asking elders questions on *zikiriw*.

‘[Zikiri] it is a means of transmission so as to get it even better. In today’s *civilisation*, the mentality of French people is no longer the same as it was yesterday. Considering what I just said, we often need to adapt ourselves to present times’<sup>394</sup> (Ahmed, 65 years old).

This quotation was among the rare examples we collected that supported *zikiri*. Ahmed’s intervention occurred just after a series of mockeries and criticisms of *zikiriw* voiced by various elders who could think of no ‘benefit’ (*nafa*) from them. They said the so-called ‘zikiriw’ are just ‘noise’ (*mankan*); ‘they are un-Islamic.’<sup>395</sup> I suspected that Ahmed stated his supportive opinion in French so as to not upset his Muslim mosque-mates who did not know French. By linking people’s mentality with the notion of ‘*civilisation*’, Ahmed emphasised disagreements between generations over ideas of modernity raised by the controversy about *zikiri* in Mali.

‘*Zikiri* used to be performed with the tongue. Religious retreat used to be performed with the tongue (...). In *zikiri* we utter the name of God many times so as to obtain religious rewards. If you utter the name of God many times, you will collect religious rewards. But to do it a bit on *balafon*<sup>396</sup> and things like that; this did not happen in our epoch! We did not do it. However some people say it is done

<sup>392</sup> On AMUPI, see introduction.

<sup>393</sup> While most mosques welcomed my group-interviews, three mosques suspected the nature of my research: the main mosque of reformist allegiance missed our first appointment; its Imams accepted a second appointment, but the meeting was apparently not open to all as I had wanted. Instead of in the mosque (or in its courtyard), the group-interview surprisingly happened in the house of the first Imam of the mosque; it involved only the members of the committee of the mosque. The main Imam of another mosque of reformist allegiance refused the group-interview because I was not Muslim. A mosque built by AMA (*Agence des Musulmans d’Afrique*; a Kuwaiti-financed Islamic NGO) missed our first two appointments. Muslims of this mosque turned to be openly very suspicious about my work because, as they told me, their Imam is not paid by AMA any more due to American cuts and international pressures in the financing of Islamic NGOs. As he told me, the President of the local AMUPI organised these group-interviews for me so as show me the openness of most Muslims despite the bad reputation of Islam in the Western world.

<sup>394</sup> ‘C’est une manière de transmettre pour mieux capter encore. Avec la civilisation actuelle, l’esprit d’un français de hier et d’un français d’aujourd’hui c’est différent. Tout compte fait chez nous ici, il faut souvent se marier avec le temps, le moment.’

<sup>395</sup> ‘*Zikiri nin te silame yé*’. On secular popular musical performances classified as ‘anti-Islamic’ and identified with ‘youth’ among Tuareg in Niger, see Rasmussen (2000). By contrast, musical *zikiri* is labelled as *religious* popular music by sympathisers of Haidara in Mali.

<sup>396</sup> Traditional xylophone.

today and it does not spoil the religion. Others say it is shameful to do it like that<sup>397</sup> (Ibrahim, 67 years old).

Ibrahim, like most elders, differentiated between ‘their epoch’ (*an tile*) and ‘today’ (*bi*) in term of the ‘spirit of times’ (see Durham 2004, 592). Sometimes elders referred to their epoch as ‘the time when we were born’ (*an tun be bangin tuma min na*). By expressing their own epoch as the time of their birth, elders stressed the fact that the period in which they were born and grew up still conditioned their life generally. Their ideas of modernity do not result from contemporary everyday life. Elders are still marked by a specific period of their life, their youth, which continue to guide them years after this meaningful period ended.

Elders’ religious education happened in an epoch when the Islamic faith was above all built around a body of standardised Islamic practices and the cultivation of ‘the fear of God’ (*ka Ala siran*)<sup>398</sup> as the call to Islam; at that time *zikiri* was associated with ‘the recollection of the tongue’ of the longstanding Qadiriya and Tijaniya Sufi traditions in Mali, and the long, lonely and demanding sessions of prayer practice during ‘spiritual retreat’ (*kaluwa*). In 2009 Ibrahim deplored the fact that ‘now everything is found in *zikiri*’,<sup>399</sup> such as musical instruments which bring ‘shame’ (*maloya*) on the Islam he was familiar with. As an old Imam of Qadiriya allegiance we met in Bougouni, many elders there think Islam today ‘has multiplied’ (*cayara*) and ‘changed’ (*yeleman*) compared to their epoch. While elders acknowledged Sufi *dhikr* as respectful ‘old thing’ (*ko kɔɔ*)<sup>400</sup>, they did not understand this ‘new thing’ (*ko kura*)<sup>401</sup> that is also called *zikiri*. For them, the so-called ‘*zikiri*’ is just one of the new things coming from the breakdown of Islam into ‘numerous tendencies’ (*bolo fara*) found today. Elders blame the current process of religious pluralisation for being made up of new things that have nothing to do with what they think Islam is about. They stated that listening to musical *zikiriw* did not bring any ‘understanding’ (*faamuya*) of Islam. Others go so far as to say that those who listen to musical *zikiriw* just ‘give up their honour and do not walk on the Islamic path anymore.’<sup>402</sup> As explained in chapter 2, many elders criticised the state of moral decline found in post-1991 Mali. They perceived musical *zikiri* as another threat to elders’ ‘authority’ (*fanga*) in favour of the youth. When my fieldwork assistant mentioned the fact that Haïdara was behind these *zikiriw*, elders avoided pronouncing their views because they did not want publicly to criticise

<sup>397</sup> *Zikiri a tun be da. Kaluwa tun be da (...). Zikiri, an be Ala tɔɔɔ fɔ ka caya pour an be baraji sɔɔɔ. Paseke ni ɛ yé Ala tɔɔɔ fɔ ka caya, ɛ be baraji sɔɔɔ. Mais ka na a ke dɔɔni bala fɔ ni fen nin, ninnu kun tɛ an tile la de! An kɔni ma o ke. Mais bi a be a ke ka o tɛ diine cɛn. Dɔ were be a fɔ ko a ke malo dɔɔni.*

<sup>398</sup> I will develop local conceptions of ‘the fear of God’ in the concluding section of this chapter.

<sup>399</sup> *Fen be ɛ be o fɔ a kono.*

<sup>400</sup> Or *fen kɔɔ*.

<sup>401</sup> Or *fen kura*.

<sup>402</sup> ‘Ka ta danbé yere bla fɔ Ala sira bla.’

the powerful Islamic actor who is Haïdara today. As an Imam responded 'Haïdara has become an important person; we respect him.'<sup>403</sup> However elders' tongues loosened during informal conversations outside the mosque.

As Soares has also noted (2005, 235), 'the overall effect of the proliferation of recorded sermons like those of Haïdara has been the opening-up of debate about Islam and how to be Muslim that sometimes seems to impinge on the prerogatives of existing Muslim religious leaders (...).' While youths appreciated Haïdara because he 'opens the envelope' of Islam by unveiling its '*soubassements*', many elders criticised him for the ferocious attacks he launched on the traditional Muslim establishment of Mali (traditional Sufis and so-called 'Wahhabis') and their followers in his sermons.<sup>404</sup> Elders criticised Haïdara for being a 'vulgar man' who undermines the prevalence of a dogma-oriented traditional Muslim education in the construction of Muslim faith in Mali.

Haïdara's opponents also resented his popularity; they interpreted Haïdara's criticism of traditional Islamic education as an incentive to the empowerment of youths and of their ideas of modernity. Others pointed to the fact that Haïdara lied about Islam. As Kadari, a retired teacher living in Bougouni, expressed it, Haïdara is a '*philomane*' that is to say 'a misleading philosopher'.

'Haïdara fell into his own trap. Before, he blamed rich people riding lavish cars when their neighbours were poor as being not Muslim. Now he himself possesses big Hummers' (Kadari, 62 years old).

*Ansar Dine* is also involved in projects of social welfare in Mali.<sup>405</sup> In March 2009 Haïdara, the President, and the Minister of Health of Mali inaugurated the *Centre de Santé Chérifla* in Bankoni, a new hospital entirely financed by *Ansar Dine* International (see left picture below). Nevertheless, many elders suspected Haïdara of using *Ansar Dine* to sustain the ostentatious and comfortable lifestyle of his family. For them, the numerous *sections* and *sous-sections* of *Ansar Dine* throughout Mali and beyond simply shape a network of fund-raising that works for the wealth of Haïdara.

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<sup>403</sup> 'Haïdara kera mɔɔɔba yé, an bɛ a bonya.'

<sup>404</sup> Schulz wrote '[Haïdara] never specified whose behaviour was under scrutiny' in his public interventions (2006a, 143). However, most Muslims guessed who were criticized by Haïdara.

<sup>405</sup> 'Islam's new visibility in Malian social and political life, seen in the mushrooming infrastructure of Islamic welfare organisations financed by sponsors from the Arabic-speaking world, concurred with the breakdown of state-supported domains of social infrastructure since the mid-1980s' (Schulz 2012, 13). In response to numerous Mosques and Muslim centres financed by Arabic countries in Bamako, Haïdara proudly announced during his first public sermon for the celebration of Maouloud 2010 in Bamako that the *Centre de Santé Chérifla* was financed by Malian money only. For a general analysis of the politics of aid in the Muslim world, see Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan (2009).



Pictures, video-tapes and DVDs in circulation in local markets showing Haïdara's convoy of Hummers and Mercedes surrounded by bodyguards and wading through the jubilant crowd in the Modibo Keita Stadium (see photograph 22 above right) irritated his opponents; they accused his followers of considering Haïdara as a 'Prophet' or a 'chief of state' (see photograph 21 above left)<sup>406</sup> and blamed Haïdara for not discouraging such views.<sup>407</sup> For them, devotional praises made by his followers, such as found in musical *zikiriw*, are un-Islamic because they represent a dangerous shift into idol worship.

Whereas elders accused Haïdara of changing the nature of Muslim education, hence Islamic faith, his popularity and the success of *Ansar Dine* in Mali reflect also the empowerment of the majority of Malians (the youths) as political actors and rightful Muslims in their own country.

<sup>406</sup> Handshaking between Haïdara and the President of Mali during the inauguration of *Centre de Santé Chérifla* in 2009; Haïdara's conspicuous arrival in the Modibo Keita Stadium of Bamako for the celebration of a late 2000s Maouloud (photograph taken from [www.bamanet.net](http://www.bamanet.net)).

<sup>407</sup> Others just told me that Haïdara is victim of his own success. He does not fully control the members of *Ansar Dine* any longer.

### ***Islam, ageing and maturity in Mali***

By contrast to representatives of the AMUPI, Haïdara did not denounce the reopening of bars and night-clubs during Ramadan that was decided by the transitional military regime under Colonel Toumani Touré in 1991. In 2009 many of my Muslim friends still remembered Haïdara's public intervention at that time; Haïdara criticised those Muslims promoting the closure of bars and night-clubs during Ramadan by claiming this as evidence of weak faith. The fact that they demonstrated against the reopening of bars and night-clubs during Ramadan only illustrated their own temptations towards alcohol consumption. Once again, Haïdara questioned the nature of Islamic faith and invited Muslims to look at the intentions behind their religious practices. For him, the one who has faith in Islam has a strong self-discipline; he is not tempted by corrupting desires such as alcohol consumption. The true Muslim is simply not disturbed by bars and night-clubs.

According to the elders, the self-discipline put forward by Haïdara is easier said than done. Haïdara does not consider the fact that, for them, the maturity of someone is related to his age.

'Young people do not follow traditions anymore. In the past, parents knew the character of their children. They chose the bride or the groom in relation to the character of their child. If their characters fit together, love grows later. This is sure. But young people want to choose by themselves and they confound desire with love. Later, as characters do not match well together, they divorce. I prefer the way our ancestors did it.' (Aminata, 68 years old, Bougouni)

By contrast to the stereotype of maturing as a process of gaining knowledge, Aminata reflects upon her ageing as a process of knowing the difference between desires and sentiments. For her, young people are characterised by an immature emotional life that needs to be guided by their elders; as they confound sexual desire with true love, their choice of partner usually ends up in divorce. In similar vein, many elders do not consider listening to *zikiri* to be part of broader Islamic practices because they suspect young Muslims do not listen to them with pious intentions. Elders agree one can love God, the Prophet and his descendants. However, Muslim should foremost feel the 'fear of God' ('*Ka siran Ala la'*') which elders think is not cultivated by youth anymore, as is illustrated by listening to musical *zikiri* as pious fun. The *Bamanan* expression, although not etymologically linked to the Arabic term *taqwā*,<sup>408</sup> resonates with this latter. '*Ka siran Ala la'*' refers to a virtuous fear and denotes reverence in

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<sup>408</sup> See entries for 'piety' and 'fear' in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (McAuliffe 2001).

the service to God rather than a distressing state of anxiety. It encapsulates the submission of a Muslim to God. The pious fear of God also reminds Muslims that they will be judged by God after death. This pious sentiment also generates a sort of countdown that tends to be felt more at the dusk of life than at the dawn of life.

Beyond the criterion of experience, associations between ageing and maturity made by elders in Mali illustrate their concerns about the weakening of their traditional authority in contemporary power relations in which youths, supported by their demographic weight, increasingly established themselves as a powerful actor in Malian society.

However, beyond disagreements between generations over ideas of modernity, elders and youths often associate modernity with two civilising forces: Islam and electricity. I study their connections through the night life of Bougouni, an analysis that completes the exploration of the metaphor of sight found during daytime in urban street life I developed throughout the dissertation.

## 7. Night life

A classic urban/rural dichotomy shapes the religious landscape in Mali.<sup>409</sup> The urban is the site of Islam as a 'civilising' (*civilisé*) force, whereas, the rural is home to the 'backward' (*arriéré, broussard*) forces of *Bamanaya*. To illustrate, in 2009 I surprised to notice a big *ronier* palm tree standing right in the middle of one of the main streets of the old district of Dougounina. I asked why it was there. According to local recollections, when Bougouni was composed of three separate districts, locals feared this *ronier* because it hosted powerful djinns; nobody settled next to it, or dared to cut it down because they did not want to provoke the wrath of its occult inhabitants. Locals also bypassed the *ronier* during the night where they believed witches<sup>410</sup> gathered there and transformed into lions and hyenas that attacked passers-by. Over time Bougouni enlarged, becoming a locality of seven contiguous districts. The *ronier* remained, but it stood right in the middle of a street, and locals gradually changed their mind about it. By 2009-2010 people in Bougouni were no longer afraid of the *ronier* which had lost its occult character. I even attended an Islamic public sermon (*waajuli*) at the foot of the tree during the night. An elder who lived nearby the *ronier* told me: 'The djinns left the *ronier* due to the growth of the town. Djinns do not like industries, urban products and their smell. They do not like electrical light as well. Therefore they moved away.' Bougouni became urban; *Bamanaya* agents moved to the bush country and Islam spread into the town. The once notorious tree was cut down shortly after the end of my stay in Bougouni. As my friend told me over the phone: 'It disturbed the traffic too much.'

As the elder indicated, one of the most important markers of urbanisation in Mali is electricity. For Malians, whatever its size a locality without electricity<sup>411</sup> cannot be considered as a town. What I want to highlight here is that electricity has not only helped to keep *Bamanaya* agents at bay, but has also brought new kind of life to the town: night life. Indeed my friends used to say that Bougouni is a town because of its night activities. Street lighting enables the domestication of the night in Bougouni; by comparison, night life is limited in surrounding villages. In this chapter, I want to study night life in the town of Bougouni through

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<sup>409</sup> For a critic of the rural-urban dichotomy, see Geschiere and Gugler (1998).

<sup>410</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>411</sup> Better-off villagers are now buying solar panels and car batteries so as to be able to watch TV and to kindle an electrical bulb for specific occasions (TV news, soap operas, Champions' League football games...). Nonetheless, such private sources of electricity remain limited. A locality with electricity is a locality linked to powerful public sources of electricity (dams, big generators) mostly (if not exclusively) managed by the EDM Company (*Energie du Mali*). The electricity of the town of Bougouni is produced by two big, old generators. Their capacity is insufficient to respond to the increasing demand for electricity by the inhabitants. Power cuts are so regular that locals jokingly nickname EDM as '*Energie du Mal*' (power of evil).

the encounter between what locals conceive as being among the main 'civilising' forces associated with urbanisation in Mali: Islam and electricity.<sup>412</sup>

### ***The anthropology of the night and Muslim life in Bougouni***

Thinking about the West and Asia, the social scientists Brigitte Steger and Lodewijk Brunt invite us to investigate 'what is going on outside the 7 to 11 rhythm that is often considered the framework for our lives' (2003, 1). I would like to do the same for Mali.

The framework of rural life follows daylight, which is roughly from 5.30 am to 7 pm. After 8 pm, with no electrical light, night life is mostly for sleeping. Outside *Bamanan* rituals (e.g. spirit cults) and musical events (e.g. local orchestra),<sup>413</sup> by 9 pm, except for a few intrepid young people, the entire village community rests. In an urban setting, the framework of life is extended because of electricity. In Bougouni, most inhabitants awake between 7 am and 9 pm. Urbanites usually go to bed around 10 pm. Common night activities (*grins*, shops and small restaurants) however continue at least until midnight on the perimeter of street lighting.<sup>414</sup> The coach station and the international road Bamako - Abidjan (among other spaces) are important sources of activity after midnight. Life in town is more varied than in the countryside because of the opportunities for night life. How might the anthropology of the night help us to understand Muslim life in Bougouni?

*Bamanankan* greetings divide the day into four periods: the morning (*a ni sɔgɔma*), the afternoon (*a ni tile*), the late afternoon up to the evening (*a ni wula*)<sup>415</sup> and the night (*a ni su*). In this chapter I focus on the last period of the day which starts after dinner time in Mali (7 - 9 pm). 'Night' (*su*) is a time the social sciences have tended to ignore for various reasons, such as considering the night as the continuity of the day (as if the night does not differ from the day in term of social significance) and therefore taking ethnography as a daytime activity only. However, following Schnepel and Ben-Ari, the quotidian is not only about everyday life; it also concerns 'every-night life' (2005, 153). The night as time of darkness (by contrast to the day as

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<sup>412</sup> On electric light as metonym for modernity, development and enlightenment for rural Mongolians during the Soviet-era electrification programme, see Sneath (2009).

<sup>413</sup> In the village of Fama in southeast Mali where I did six months fieldwork in 2004-2005, a local orchestra played twice a week during the night in a public place. Children and teenagers (mostly) came together there, socialised and danced to the *balafon* until late into the night. Indeed, *Balani* also means *balafon* which is a sort of xylophone (wooden keyed percussion idiophone of West Africa).

<sup>414</sup> Street lighting is switched on until the next morning.

<sup>415</sup> *Wula* or *le petit soir* (4pm – 7pm) is the period of time before dusk. It is usually the best moment for a walk because the sun is warm but does not burn.



time of daylight) is a specific period of quotidian life which deserves to be approached distinctively. How does darkness of the night 'shed light' on Muslim life in Mali?<sup>416</sup>

The nascent anthropology of the night pays attention to three main themes: sleep, dreams and nightlife (Steger and Brunt 2003; Schnepel and Ben-Ari 2005; Galinier 2010). My focus here is on nightlife as a specific period of 'free-time' (Steger and Brunt 2003, 5). Most Malians are involved in chores and obligations during the daylight; the day is primarily devoted to 'work' (*baara*). However, after dinner Malians generally enjoy a period of 'free-time' (*lafyia*)<sup>417</sup> before sleeping time. The notion of *lafyia* refers to leisure, pleasure and hedonistic practices in Mali. The particularity of this period of free time is its occurrence during darkness which reduces social control based on sight.

Inspired by works like *Living Islam* (see Marsden 2005, 54-55), I argue the interplay between 'the open' and 'the hidden' as the interplay between day life and night life is an important component of morality in Mali. Whereas the anthropologist Magnus Marsden focuses on the sense of hearing,<sup>418</sup> I emphasise the sense of sight. More generally, this chapter relates also to an 'anthropology of senses' which argues that 'the senses are shapers of culture, but they are also bearers of culture' (Howes 1991, 17) because, as illustrated with the importance of balancing in the development of Anlo-Ewe identity in Ghana, 'sensory orders' are not a result of human biological features; they vary based on 'cultural traditions' (Geurts 2002, see introduction). However, my emphasis on sight does not indicate the presence of a 'modern occularcentric epistemology' of Western origins (Hirschkind 2006, 18)<sup>419</sup> in this analysis. It first and foremost originates from the open character of street life found in urban Mali which fosters ostentatious practices and moral evaluations based on sight in Bougouni.

Indeed, the three main spaces of sociality (*carré*, grin and street) make life a public performance.<sup>420</sup> Behaviour can be observed and assessed. 'Daily life is spent outdoors under the gaze of neighbours or passers-by and one lives in a quasi-constant state of surveillance, comparable, in some respects with Bentham's panopticon' (Archambault 2010, 123). In such open settings, Islam contributes to the moral evaluation of life through visual social control. Outward signs of piety advertise the shaping of moral subjects for instance. 'To be' is also informed by 'to appear/look'. The relationship between public, power and Islam has transformed Islamic identity as a resource significant in the broader politics of success in

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<sup>416</sup> Schnepel and Ben-Ari's idiom (2005, 156).

<sup>417</sup> In Hausa the same term means 'well-being'; the term 'al-afia' in Arabic means 'rest' or 'time-off'.

<sup>418</sup> In Pakistan's North-West frontier, Magnus found that 'keeping purdah, (...), is as much about concealing thoughts and emotions as it is about covering heads and bodies' (2005, 22); on meaningful illustration of purdah practice (Ibid, 103-104).

<sup>419</sup> 'The senses are not a stable foundation upon which a singular and unassailable truth can be erected, as an empiricist epistemology would claim, but rather a space of indeterminacy, heterogeneity, and possibility' (Hirschkind 2006, 20).

<sup>420</sup> On spaces of sociality, see chapter 1.

Bougouni and beyond.<sup>421</sup> However, the open dimension of day life contrasts with the hidden dimension of night life. Therefore I want to complete the exploration of the metaphor of sight in Muslim life I initiated in chapters 1 (Spaces of sociality), stressed in chapter 2 (Public Islam; 'zigzag Muslims') and deepened in chapter 5 (A successful life; Riches as a sign of blessing) through an anthropology of the night in Bougouni.

The night has usually been defined and judged in negative terms such as chaos, darkness and fear. It has also been associated with wild and evil beings, activities and sentiments (see chapter 5 on jealousy, egoism and witchcraft in Bougouni).<sup>422</sup> Therefore humans have tried to master, to colonise and to domesticate the night in many ways. A decisive breakthrough in the pacification of the night was the invention of electricity in the nineteenth century.<sup>423</sup> However, electrical light is not as efficient as daylight because electricity cannot enlighten all the darkness of the night. Popular wisdom advises people not to wander at night into an unlighted narrow street for instance. We never know what malevolent intentions lurk in the dark street corners.

In general Malian towns are characterised by patchy and dim street lighting (see photograph 23 below). Only the main streets in the centre of Bougouni, and few bigger streets in residential areas, benefit from limited street lighting. Other than light-bulbs, here and there, indicating shops and TV spots, the overwhelming majority of inner streets are shrouded in darkness.



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<sup>421</sup> See conclusion of chapter 2.

<sup>422</sup> On witch-children at night in Kinshasa, see De Boeck (2004).

<sup>423</sup> In our contemporary world the domestication of the night can be supplemented with cameras such as illustrated in the CCTV video surveillance system of London.

While some people apprehend the unseen, uncontrollable and malevolent character of the night, others welcome the night as a darkness that hides. By contrast to Boubacar's wife who worried about nocturnal threats of witchcraft to her two young boys, Salif the tailor appreciated visiting his girlfriend under cover of the night. As visual perception becomes limited, the street ambiance alters; activities seem wrapped around with mystery. In this way, night life is simply less bound to control by sight than day life. People who want to 'obtain relief from the structures and strictures of the day' (Schnepel and Ben-Ari 2005, 154) use darkness to transgress public order, to bypass daytime morality, and to accede to alternative life.<sup>424</sup>

Furthermore whereas daytime privileges sight, nighttime promotes other types of experience. As the 'thereness' of the day disappears into the darkness, social contact has to be done within 'hereness' (Handelman 2005, 253-254).<sup>425</sup> Social life in darkness asks for close contact; night life encourages intimacy and opens up new dimensions of existence such as the search for pleasure and unrealised possibilities. Inspired by Schnepel and Ben-Ari (2005, 160), I investigate the night as a sort of 'counter-hegemonic' time when alternative activities and un-Islamic desires are sought away from the moral restrictions of the day and the scrutiny of public Islam.<sup>426</sup> Day and night are cyclical, thus they both shape the quotidian; more importantly, because their transition is progressive, I enter into the darkness of the night from the daylight in gradual terms.

### ***Every-night life in Bougouni***

There is no clear-cut transition between day and night. Following a movement 'from day-night into night day' (Handelman 2005, 248), I invite the reader to enter progressively into the night by describing how a typical late afternoon in Bougouni unfolds gradually into every-night life. Southwest Mali is close to the Equator, therefore there is little difference in the length of daylight between seasons.<sup>427</sup> According to an official website on weather,<sup>428</sup> sunset in Bamako varies between 6.03 pm (November) and 7.02 pm (July): the day-night transition is almost

<sup>424</sup> On an anthropological study of the appropriation of the night by young people in Madrid, see Tinat (2005).

<sup>425</sup> On the social phenomenology of night, see Handelman (2005).

<sup>426</sup> In his study of African religions in Brazil, Bastide analyses a situation in which the day belongs to the whites, and the marginal group of former slaves appropriates the night as a time for counter-hegemonic display (*candomblé* brotherhood) (1960); on the night as the expression of a dominated culture, see Galinier (2010, 828).

<sup>427</sup> There are also only two seasons in Mali; the dry season and the wet season.

<sup>428</sup> <http://www.weather.com/>; the sunrise in Bamako varies from 6.05 am (Mai) to 6.58 am (January).

unchanging through the year in Bougouni. The closer you come to the Equator, the quicker darkness falls. At the beginning of my stay in Bougouni, I was astonished several times by the rapidity with which the darkness of the night invested the town.

A typical late afternoon in Bougouni unfolds in the following sequence of events. Schools and civil administration close around 5 pm; daily activities in the centre of Bougouni decrease drastically approaching the time for the fourth prayer of the day (*Maghrib*) a quarter of an hour before sunset. After dealing with the last clients of the day, most traders tidy their shops. Then they perform their ablutions, pray and close their shops. After the fourth prayer, the big market and its vicinity empty quickly. Artisans, labourers, merchants and street peddlers head home accompanied by the setting sun which refracts through reddish dust in suspension in the air. As it darkens and the horizon disappears, so the traffic becomes indistinct, not least the many vehicles without lights! At the same time in residential areas, children are playing within and around their *carré*. Wives and housemaids finish preparing the dinner. A little later, families will come together in their *carré* around dinner. Those who spent their day in town ask after those who stayed in the neighbourhood. Dinner is usually eaten quietly, but at 8.15 pm all gather in front of the TV to watch the popular Brazilian soap opera,<sup>429</sup> which ends at 8.45 pm. By then the street lighting is on and darkness otherwise wraps the town. Babies and small children show signs of tiredness. Sleeping time is coming for the youngest. The other members of the family surround their elders and the head of family who are watching the national news on ORTM (9 - 9.45pm).<sup>430</sup> The end of national news coincides with sleeping time for older children and their elders among them, after a long day, some are nodding off. Not without difficulty, the rest of children are sent to bed. If they have not already done so, Muslims complete their fifth and last regular prayer of the day. The town then is ready to sleep. However, a minority of the inhabitants decide to stay awake a bit longer so as to enjoy nocturnal free-time and to get involved in the night activities going on in town.

I lived with a family whose *carré* was lighted by a nearby streetlight; our entrance overlooked one of the few big sandy streets in residential areas which benefited from street lighting. The next *carré* on the right occupied a busy junction which attracted most the night life of the neighbourhood. Two small cement-built commercial units adjoining the wall of this *carré* hosted a grocery and a clothing workshop which remained open every evening until midnight. The shopkeeper of the grocery brought a TV set, a bench and a couple of chairs out each evening; there men came together, drank tea and chatted while watching night TV

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<sup>429</sup> In 2009, A TV set was found in most urban *carrés*; on the watching of soap operas in Mali, see Schulz (2006c).

<sup>430</sup> Malians usually go to bed a bit later on Friday evening due to the popular music TV programme called '*Top Etoiles*' (10.15 pm - 00.05 am). When the overwhelming majority of families has only access to the free public service of ORTM TV channel, only a couple of rich families in Bougouni can afford access to the many TV channels provided by CANAL + TV subscriptions.

programmes on ORTM (sport, folklore, Indian movies and religious programmes).<sup>431</sup> Such circles of men constitute one of the numerous night *grins* found here and there alongside the streets of Bougouni.<sup>432</sup> At the same time, women popped quickly into the tailor's shop so as to check their most recent order. The mother of the family living in the corner helped by her two eldest daughters had installed a sort of small restaurant (*gargote*) which was open every evening between 7 and 10.30 pm. Latecomers who found empty pots at home and passers-by who felt peckish could order soft drinks (*sucreries*), salad, peas, rice and sauce (...) there. Motorised vehicles stopped to buy petrol in the *essencitigi*<sup>433</sup> sitting in front of the grocery on the other side of the street. In another corner of this busy junction, young men spent their coins at a video games spot. Lonely students studied for exams under streetlights located further down the street. To complete this night life picture, a couple of children defied sleeping time by playing a worn table football standing to the right of the small petrol station. Such night activities usually stop around midnight.

Women involved in the night economy worked on the threshold of their *carré*, or accompanied their husband to his night livelihood activity. However, they were rather rare in Bougouni because, according to tradition, their presence in the night is negatively perceived.<sup>434</sup> Night life is also structured by age. 'Female teenagers' (*sunguruw*), 'male teenagers' (*kamalenw*), and 'children' (*denmisenw*) are expected to remain within *carrés* after dinner time and to go to sleep soon after. Night life is primarily the domain of men.<sup>435</sup>

### ***The nocturnal confinement of women***

In her study of the seclusion of women (*kubli*) in the town of Dogondoutchi in Niger, the anthropologist Adeline Masquelier demonstrates how conservative Islamic movements have helped to promote the seclusion of women as an expression of female piety and the preservation of a woman's 'reputation as a modest and honourable wife' among ordinary Muslims, and even among the opponents of such reformist movements (see 2009, 97-106). In Dogondoutchi Masquelier observed in early 2000 that women stayed home, avoided entering

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<sup>431</sup> ORTM TV programs end around midnight.

<sup>432</sup> On *grin*, see chapter 1.

<sup>433</sup> Someone who sells petrol stored in recycled bottles.

<sup>434</sup> On similar gendered perceptions of mobility and spatial access to the night in India, see Patel (2010).

<sup>435</sup> When public events, such as an Islamic public sermon or wedding party, take place at night, women, teenagers and children can go out without raising suspicion. On similar nocturnal public sermons happening in the town of Korhogo in the 1980s, however, only during funerals, weddings and Muslim celebrations, see Launay (1997, 68; 163-175). Teenagers and children also go out at night when a mobile discotheque (*balani*) is organised in their neighbourhood.

public spaces (such as the marketplace), and relied on 'young female visitors' for 'news, errands and company' (2009, 98). Although the generalisation that 'staying at home and attending to domestic chores are the best ways for a woman to earn respect' (Ibid, 99) also applies somewhat to Mali, women's mobility and autonomy in Bougouni is greater than in Dogondoutchi.

In a general manner, Malian society is characterised by a gendered division of work. Ideally a man's duty is to provide food (*nasongo* or *les prix de condiments*), shelter, clothing and medicine for his wife (or wives) and his children. In complementary fashion, a woman is associated with home: that is cooking, household chores and child rearing. In the current situation of economic scarcity,<sup>436</sup> however, it is common to see women involved in the local economy as well; they do so to financially support their husband and to meet their female needs.<sup>437</sup> It is not rare to see women involved in small trades selling vegetable, clothing and jewellery in the big market of Bougouni. Women selling cakes, water, soft drinks and fruits to travellers are also numerous in the coach station of Bougouni. Within residential areas, some women sit outside their *carré* and sell dishes and finger food such as 'salty pea fritters' (*sho furufuru*) and 'sweet potato chips' (*woso jiranen*) with 'chilli' (*foronto*). A small minority of successful women have even become entrepreneurs and are involved in bigger businesses in Bougouni. To illustrate, Aïcha, a retired teacher living in the district of Torakabougou, as well as selling rich '*bazins*' (brocades) in Bamako, financed a chicken farm at the outskirt of Bougouni which produced hundreds of eggs per day. Most of the times I visited her, I found her husband watching their house from the terrace and saying 'she travelled!' Although Aïcha is an exception to the norm in Bougouni, Malian women aspired to be involved in the local economy so as to help their husband financially and to become more autonomous. Men accepted their economic activities as long as they were not carried on to the detriment of household chores. Often women engaged in the local economy were helped by their daughters. Others hired housemaids and delegated to them their household chores.

Women commonly entered public spaces as clients. For instance, almost every day, either the oldest daughter of my host family, or their housemaid went to the centre of Bougouni in order to buy food ingredients. Although linked to home, women enjoyed a degree of mobility during the daytime in Bougouni and they were important agents of local economy in 2009. The significant role women have played in farming in rural Mali since the pre-colonial period may have paved the road to women's contemporary mobility in local economy.

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<sup>436</sup> In Dogondoutchi, the seclusion of women was a sign of upper social status because it required hiring servants to accomplish chores linked to the outside world. Thus, economic hardships might forced a husband 'to grant his wives greater autonomy and make use of their labor' outside the compound Masquelier (2009, 100).

<sup>437</sup> Perfumes, clothing, jewellery and other personal needs shape '*musoya*' (womanhood) in Mali.

Although Masquelier did not focus on the mobility of women during the night, she observed how secluded women in Dogondoutchi took advantage of the darkness of the night to leave the walls of their compound (see 2009, 98-99; 101): 'These secluded wives [were] allowed to visit neighbours and kin after nightfall, when obscurity makes them less likely to be noticed by potential admirers (Ibid, 98).' Women in Bougouni, however, were bound to traditional norms of nocturnal confinement. Such norms should not be understood as strict rules acting like insurmountable obstacles. Rather, they shaped a disposition of female ethos towards good manners. Any adult woman of good education (but especially a married woman) is expected to stay at home after dinner time. Nevertheless, women occasionally may have to go out after dinner time. In this way a woman seen during the night does not raise suspicion automatically. For instance, a woman walking under the light, wearing decent dress (traditional wrapper, *boubou*, plain jumper) and heading toward a local shop does not necessarily raise suspicion.<sup>438</sup> Men in the streets might think she has been commissioned by an elder because her presence is visible and unambiguous.

However, if a woman is often observed out at night, her habit invites suspicion. In addition, if her presence is furtive and unfathomable, her 'reputation' (*danbé*) will be undermined if her identity is discovered. Gossip will take place in the neighbourhood. Women should stay at home. She should not 'walk-around' (*yaala*) without good reason. The verb *yaala* can simply mean going out for a walk, however, a walk in the night connotes secret activities; in this way, the verb *yaala* when used of the night signifies flirting. It is only for a known and accepted reason that a woman can go out without raising suspicion. A woman regularly spotted and identified in the night is likely to be labelled as '*sunguruba*' (prostitute), '*bandite*' (bandit) or '*vagabonde*' (hellraiser). People think only spouses deceiving their husband, and unmarried women involved in casual sex go out under the cover of the darkness. Although '*sunguru.ba*' (see above) and '*kamalen.ba*' have similar etymological logic, *kamalenba* does not have a strongly negative connotation; it simply means a seducer (and not a male prostitute). Here the *Bamanan* expressions about the fact of having multiple sexual partners illustrate men's control of women's body (such as found in many other languages). The night life as free-time in town is not the domain of woman.

At a more pragmatic level, women usually avoid going out at night because they are tired from their daily work and need to sleep. They are the first to wake up the next morning in order to sweep the courtyard, kindle the hearth and prepare breakfast. Any married woman

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<sup>438</sup> Women should avoid wearing skin-tight or low-cut tops. They should also avoid wearing blue-jeans because it is judged as sexy clothing in Mali. Once, I attended a civil marriage in Bougouni. Most men and women wore lavish *boubou* with jewellery. In the crowd, however, my male friends spotted a woman wearing tight blue-jeans and red blouse. For them, the display of such sexy cloths meant a 'loose woman'. One of my friends approached her and came back with a mobile number; whether hers I do not know.

neglecting household chores will soon become the laughing-stock of the local community; such behaviour is highly stigmatised in Bougouni, and if repeated it may lead to divorce.

### ***Night as a time of secrecy***

The night is also a time of secrecy. Social scientists have widely written on the realm of secrecy. With regard to the Muslim world of West Africa, many anthropologists have explored the notion of secrecy in relation to Islamic esoteric sciences, in which respect secret (Ar. *sirr*) is before all an important component of power and religious authority (see Dilley 2004). Inspired by Georg Simmel's pioneering essay on the social significance of secrecy, in this study of every-night life I am instead interested in the fact that 'the secret produces an immense enlargement of life' (1950, 330).<sup>439</sup> The darkness of the night wraps activities into secrecy. The realm of possibilities widens as day time morality is altered. In other words, the darkness of the night prevents allegedly immoral behaviour from becoming public; in this way 'shame' (*maloya*) as regulator of public life is bypassed. I approach the realm of secrecy more as practice than as knowledge: night life as a time of concealment is a privileged moment when 'certain practices of secrecy provide their performers with the means to engage with the wider world' (De Jong 2007, 11). By 'wider world' I mean one going beyond the self-imposed restraint of the day and being engaged in allegedly un-Islamic practices such as flirting, casual sex, alcohol consumption, marijuana smoking, maraboutage and *Bamanan* sorcery<sup>440</sup> as instances.

The social order in Mali is rooted in 'respect' (*bonya*) which implies, above all, self-restraint. Respect is maintained through control and concealment of visible practices. Concealment happens most during the night.<sup>441</sup> For instance, I once encountered my friend Salif the tailor reprimanding his current girlfriend; he warned her not to dare meeting young men in his sight again. He then told me:

'I know and she knows we will not get married. We just do it for pleasure. I know she is with other young men as well, but I do not want to see that in front of me. The other day, I observed her

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<sup>439</sup> George Simmel also wrote 'the secret offers, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world' (1950,330); the notion of 'second world' is often related to witchcraft and sorcery in Africa (see Geschiere 1997; West 2005).

<sup>440</sup> *Bamanaya* as force of the bush is still in town because the urban as a domesticated space still contains wild zones. On nocturnal conspiracies (e.g. sorcery, witchcraft and bad persons) in Bougouni, see chapter 5.

<sup>441</sup> Mobile phones ease such concealment of practices. Similarly to Mozambique, 'mobile phone communication provides cover similar to the darkness of the night and, as such, brings the possible into everyday life' (Archambault 2010, 130).



speaking suspiciously with a young man on a Jakarta motorbike. She should not do that in front of me. She should respect me instead. Here respect is like that.<sup>442</sup>

Young women delayed their bedtime slightly so as to enjoy a short romantic meeting with their boyfriends. Female silhouettes were indeed often spotted in company presumably of their lovers just outside the threshold of *carrés* in the darkness of the street. They stayed in range of their *carré* in case their elders or their parents called them from within the house. Hearing their name, they could respond quickly.

Others, such as Oumar, a student in 8<sup>th</sup> school year who lived in the same *carré* as me, waited until the rest of the household fell asleep to go out in town discreetly. Oumar occupied a room within the main house that had a different exit from the rest of the house, where the head of family, the housemaids and the children slept. In this way, his comings and goings could easily go unnoticed during the night.<sup>443</sup> We both went out to join our respective night *grins* and to take part in the night life of the town. We were aware of one another's nocturnal life, but we never talked about it because, above all, night activities are unspoken and private matters.

Most night *grins* I visited were characterised by the discreet comings and goings of men.<sup>444</sup> Members of the *grin* sat, chatted, drank tea and took shorter (or longer) trips in towns. They took their own motorbike or borrowed someone else's, disappeared into the town and came back after a while. These short tours were announced by expressions such as 'I go and I come' (*ne bε taa ka na*) and 'I go on an errand' (*ne bε taa ci la*). What struck me the most is that people did not ask for further details about these tours. Night life in *grins* unfolded through the comings and goings of people. These unquestioned apparitions and disappearances of people into the darkness of the night continued until *grins* emptied. When I dared to question the why of these comings and goings, people just told me 'each of us has his *affaires* (business)'. Of course, some men knew exactly what was going on out there and just

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<sup>442</sup> Handling multiple relations at the same time is frequent among unmarried persons in Mali.

<sup>443</sup> I also enjoyed a room located in the annexe of the house. I used to go out by bicycle shortly after dinner time when the rest of the household was closing the main entrance of the house. When I came back after midnight, I found the gate of the *carré* was closed. Then, I parked my bicycle in front of the gate and walked along the wall to a pile of wood I used as ladder so as to climb the wall discreetly. After landing softly within the *carré* and away from the goats and chicken (in order to not frightening them!), I opened the latch of the gate and put my bicycle in my room. Oumar and myself avoided being noisy because we had to respect people's sleeping time and we had to keep our night life unnoticed in order to respect the reputation (*danbé*) of our host family.

<sup>444</sup> Françoise Grange Omokaro mentions the existence of women's *grins* in Bamako, unfortunately, without developing her point further (see 2009, 192). It is important to specify the spatial situation of *grins* in order to understand how space is gendered in Mali. *Grins* of women overlooking the street did not exist in Bougouni. Women sat and chatted within *carrés* instead. Furthermore, as they do not come together on a daily basis, their visits do not constitute a sort of continuous circle of socialisation such as the *grins* of men do. In this regard, there is no such thing as *grins* of women in Mali (on women's gathering in Mali, see Schulz (2002, 812)). The rare women who spent time in men's *grins* were girlfriends of members of *grins*. Nonetheless, these women avoided visiting men's *grins* regularly because such behaviour is ill-regarded and shows a lack of education which undermines the reputation (*danbé*) of the woman's family in Bougouni. Once, a girlfriend of a member of a *grin* arrived tearfully in the *grin*. Her parents did not want her to be seen in this *grin* anymore. She stopped coming thereafter.

covered the activities of their friends. In many cases, however, such 'empty' idioms simply meant that night is before all understood as a time for private and unspoken matters.

Others lied by saying 'I go home' (*Ne bε taa so*) or 'I go to sleep' (*Ne bε taa da*), but in reality they just moved away and unobtrusively looked after their own business in town. This kind of 'lie' (*nkalon*) is not motivated by malice and does not aim to harm someone. The lie here is more a 'mode of deception' (see Barnes 1994, 1-19) which points at covering one's tracks in the night.

In this way, such 'empty' idioms and lies were just common techniques of dissimulation highlighting the night as a time of secrecy. Inspired by Sarró's analysis of the secret in his study of religious change on the Upper Guinea Coast, the sociological dimension of secrecy here is, not only about concealing content, but also about 'creating remoteness'. Members of *grin* know that 'the real ground [of such "empty" idioms] is elsewhere', yet they do not question that (2009, 8-9). By not discussing these 'empty' idioms, members of *grins* understood comings and goings of night life as unspoken and private matters. They expected the same sort of silence about their own short tours in town. In a wider perspective, this creation of remoteness also demonstrates that 'control over secrecy and openness' is about managing privacy that is someone's autonomy and vulnerability (see Bok 1989, 18-25). Members of *grins* can speak about their night activities, but this happens rather rarely. People prefer to gossip about other people instead of speaking about themselves. As a friend used to say 'I do not speak about my plans in *grin*. The *grin* is about distraction and pleasure instead.' In fact, night *grins* work as meeting points and bases for preparing 'serious' night activities such as romantic meetings and going to night-clubs, *maquis* and undertaking other nocturnal business.

I disagree with the anthropologist Dorothea Schulz when she wrote: 'Perhaps the most important social significance of the *grin* is that it offers men of all ages a space where they can address their concerns in a sphere outside of the household among friends and peoples whom they trust' (2002, 811). The *grin* is an important space of sociality for men in Mali, but members of *grins* are not primarily linked by 'trust' (*danaya*). They come together to joke, chat and gossip about others, but they barely speak about what is going on in their intimate sphere because the *grin* is, above all, a meeting point where men have fun and gossip. Men might voice private matters in the *grin*, but not to all members of the *grin*. In other words, whereas the *grin* is about 'speaking' (*kuma*) and 'chatting' (*baro, causer*) with people, trust concerns specific friends.

When my friends and I planned to go to a *maquis* and to the night-club (or any other night plan), we nearly always proceeded in the following manner. As usual we first met in a

*grin*. We sat for a while. We chatted, joked and drank tea. When my friend(s) felt ready, we left other members of the *grin* and disappeared into the darkness of the night; like the others we quietly looked after our own '*affaires*'. 'Feeling ready' here is a question of discretion. It was very rare that my friends were ready before 11 pm. They preferred to move to a *maquis* late into the night when common every-night life became very limited.

### ***The maquis***

'Anybody who says they hate alcohol has not tasted it. If he tastes it, he will say "it is good"' (Souleymane, mechanic engineer in Bougouni, April 2009).'

As this quotation suggests, the '*maquis*' in Mali are about alcohol consumption. Alcohol has been produced in Mali as a stimulant and a medicine for centuries. Members of local spirit cults drank alcohol during possession and villagers consumed it during various celebrations. People also took alcohol as a medicine to prevent anguish and tiredness. When Islam spread into Mali the practice of alcohol consumption did not stop, but it changed.<sup>445</sup> According to Islamic tradition, alcohol has mostly been interpreted as an intoxicating substance which makes one forgetful of God and prayer; during the Prophet's time 'wine came to be condemned as *haram*, an unclean substance akin to blood and urine; drinking it became one of the greatest sins' (Tapper 2000, 219).<sup>446</sup> Therefore, local Muslim scholars often interpreted alcohol as a satanic potion whose consumption is forbidden. In this way the practice of alcohol consumption became something other than a simple pleasure; it became a vice in the eyes of most Muslims. Nonetheless, the Malian state does not prohibit the consumption of alcohol because it is a secular country which hosts a minority of Christians who consume alcohol publicly.<sup>447</sup> But most consumers of alcohol in Mali are Muslims. Given that the consumption of alcohol is socially stigmatised within the local Muslim society, Muslims who drink alcohol there do it during the night out of public sight in hidden spaces called '*maquis*'.

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<sup>445</sup> Most villages of southwest Mali have families who brew alcohol in the traditional way. They produce 'millet beer' (*dɔɔ* or *capalo*), 'palm wine' (*banji*) and 'hydromel' (*diji*; *di* (honey) and *ji* (water)). Some farmers sell their small productions of alcohol during the day of the big market of Bougouni. Three shops in town were known to sell millet beer and palm wine in their backyard. *Maquis* in town sell beers (Castel, Flag and Guinness) brewed under licence in the modern brewery of BRAMALI (*Brasserie du Mali*). They also sell various spirits (whisky, gin, rum) which are mostly produced in West African countries and distributed in small plastic bag of 4cl. Only expensive restaurants and night-clubs of the Capital import wine and spirits from Europe.

<sup>446</sup> Tapper interestingly stressed the ambiguity found in Islamic tradition between wine and sherbet (sort of wine of paradise) because both 'are combinations of fruit juice, sugar and water that are respectively sour and intoxicating, and sweet and non-intoxicating' (2000, 222).

<sup>447</sup> Alcohol taxes in Mali are set at 50%, see <http://www.izf.net/pages/mali/5243/> (retrieved the 9 June 2012).

The secret character of these sorts of Malian bars is expressed in its name: *maquis*. Surprisingly I cannot find any scientific articles whatsoever speaking about *maquis*. Furthermore nobody was able to explain the etymology of *maquis* to me. Therefore the explanation below is to be taken with caution.

Before knowing Mali, when I thought about *maquis* I imagined groups of resisters hidden in the thick forests of the *massif du Vercors* in France during the Second World War. The French resistance was organised into groups (*maquis*) of resisters (*maquisards*) who secretly fought against the Nazi German occupation of France and against the collaborationist Vichy regime. Historically, the French term '*maquis*' originates in Corsica. It means a type of Mediterranean vegetation made of impenetrable bushes, shrubs and brambles. After a vendetta or acts of banditry, Corsicans used to hide themselves in such thick forest. Indeed, "*Prendre le maquis*" was originally a Corsican expression which now signifies the act of taking refuge in the wilderness so as to escape state authority. As Mali was colonised by France, the etymological link between the *maquis* of the Second World War and the *maquis* of Mali might be plausible. Perhaps, former West African soldiers who fought in the Second World War in France somehow brought the word *maquis* home to West Africa; the term *maquis* is also used in similar way in Senegal, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire as well.<sup>448</sup> Although the *maquis* in Mali might derive from the French *maquis*, it does not cover the same situation, except in relation to concealment. The French *maquis* were prohibited because they were engaged in armed resistance against the German occupation of France. A French *maquisard* had to hide himself because he risked his life for being involved in the resistance. In the *laïc* country of Mali, the *maquis* are legal trades. The *maquis* in Mali are hidden because alcohol consumption is socially stigmatised in the predominantly Muslim society of Mali. A Muslim *maquisard* hides himself to drink alcohol so as to avoid being stigmatised within his neighbourhood and to preserve his 'reputation' (*danbé*).

Three small restaurants selling alcohol in Bougouni were visible because they were located aside and along the international tarred roads crossing the town. My local friends did not go there because these *maquis* were too exposed to the public. Such restaurant-bars attracted essentially Christians of Bougouni and travellers and truck drivers on their way to

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<sup>448</sup> The term *maquis* has also been associated with the popular uprisings of Central Africa. The Congolese political scientist Wilungula B. Cosma designated the rebellion led by Laurent Désiré Kabila in the area of Fizi (1967-1986) as "*maquis*" because it had consisted of a sort of mini-state structured into a moving network of camps hidden in the forest from which rebels led guerrilla warfare against the armed forces of Zaïre (1997, 14; 46-51). The Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe wrote a book called *La naissance du maquis dans le Sud-Cameroun (1920-1960)* in which he explains how the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC, independence movement led by Ruben Um Nyobe) turned into an underground uprising shortly after being prohibited by the colonial state in 1955; popular memory still remembers this uprising as '*maquis*' (1996, 7) partially because its formation had explicit links with the French *maquis* of the Second World War. Indeed, since the prohibition of the UPC its executive board announced that they decided to counteract the colonial repression by a resistance similar to what happened in France under the Occupation (Ibid, 329). On further readings about the *maquis* in South Cameroun, see Previtali (1999) and Sah (2008).

Bamako, Sikasso and Abidjan. One of the oldest *maquis* and brothels of Bougouni, *Le Robinet* (The Tap), also stood in an open site, nonetheless a specific one. *Le Robinet* overlooked one of the busiest areas of the town, the coach station, a space crowded by all sorts of people and described as being inhabited by all kinds of activities. As important spaces of transit, coach stations in urban Mali are difficult to monitor; so they are often associated with petty crime and banditry. Malians generally label them as '*repaires de voleurs*' (dens of thieves) and therefore say that people of good manners do not linger there. The existence of *Le Robinet* was relatively unobserved there because it fitted into the negative depiction of coach stations made by Malians themselves. *Le Robinet* also benefited from a back-door overlooking a hidden parking space which, as I will show in the second to last section, might be the reason why a *maquis* endures in Mali.

Otherwise, most *maquis* in Bougouni were located just off the tarred roads and on the fringe of residential areas. *Maquis* were hidden and therefore did not reveal themselves easily to the uninitiated.<sup>449</sup> During the first three months of my stay in Bougouni I was not interested in going to *maquis* due to the particularity of my anthropological interest: everyday Islam in Bougouni. Given that news about the activities of a white man spreads quickly in small African towns, I did not want to be associated closely with *maquis* in Bougouni; even though I knew in Mali the white man is known to drink alcohol, I wanted initially to act with a polite precaution towards alcohol consumption, so as not to risk my introduction to the local Muslim community. Later, when I felt more at home in Bougouni and I had a sense of the night life in town, I slowly approached the world of *maquis*. I met local Muslims who went to *maquis*, and like them, I drank alcohol discreetly.

When I started to be interested in *maquis*, I realised I had passed a *maquis* every day without noticing it for months! This *maquis* called '*Chez le Burkinabè*' ('Burkinabe's Place', named after its owner's nationality) was situated not far from the busy Bamako-Abidjan tarred road. It occupied one of the first *carrés* of the residential area found behind the tarred road. No placard, no sign whatsoever indicated the presence of a *maquis*.<sup>450</sup> From the tarred road, the *maquis* looked like a typical Malian *carré* fenced by a mud wall above which big mango trees and iron roofs were visible. Its door, overlooking a sandy inner street, was behind two tea-coffee-omelette shops (*shéfantigi*) and one small restaurant which usually closed late into the night. I used to stop and eat there without suspecting a *maquis* beyond the nearby mud wall. It was only when a Muslim friend brought me there at night I realised it was a *maquis*. After passing the entrance and a sort of open vestibule, we entered in a vast courtyard

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<sup>449</sup> By uninitiated I mean people who do not go to '*maquis*'.

<sup>450</sup> Sometimes a small display advertising of a beer brand can indicate the presence of a *maquis* in Mali.

characterised by a subdued atmosphere. Tables and chairs were scattered in its corners. Some sitting spots were enclosed by walls made of straw mats and by vegetal roofs. I noticed human silhouettes here and there, but they remained unidentifiable. A single light bulb illuminated the whole place from the interior of a dilapidated house standing in the middle of the *carré*. This building sheltered the most expensive element of the *maquis*: a big refrigerator to keep beers cold. The barman sat next to it and was watching DVD movies through a small TV set. From time to time, a client hailed him 'barman!' or 'pssssst!' He then stood up and came to take an order. The barman used a flashlight if the client wished to check the change given.

*Chez le Burkinabè* illustrates how a typical Malian *maquis* does not seek to domesticate the darkness of the night. On the contrary, it constitutes the main feature of the ambiance of *maquis*. Here the night is appreciated for what it is: a darkness that hides. Put differently, the *maquis* integrates 'the night-scape' which blends the person in with his surroundings' (see Handelman 2005, 253); this visual effect helps to create a private ambiance away from indiscreet and intrusive gazes.

*Maquis* are not only hidden from the outer world, they also welcome clients into a sombre atmosphere which blurs their identities. As Handelman would probably add, the "thereness" of horizon' is banished, and the "hereness" becomes limited to the table and people sitting around it (Ibid, 254). Everything is done not only to render alcohol consumption an activity hidden from the outside world, but also to make it happen as an intimate moment from within the *maquis*. The articulation between the darkness of the night and the dim light spreading from the single bulb creates an atmosphere of shadows conducive to privacy.<sup>451</sup> Clients who take women out seek *maquis* with a dark ambiance because they also want to appreciate their romantic date without being observed from within the *maquis*. Indeed, *maquis* are also spaces for extra-marital relations where lovers meet in secret away from public scrutiny. A minority of *maquis* show porn movies and have rooms called '*chambres de passe*' in their backyard. These are rented on an hourly basis mostly to illicit couples. Other *maquis* are brothels.

If it happens that a younger brother unfortunately comes across his elder in a *maquis* by accident (or any other two clients previously unaware of their respective secrets), both feel embarrassed, they avoid the shame of this unfortunate encounter by simply ignoring each other. When they meet the following days, they behave as if their encounter in the *maquis* never happened.

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<sup>451</sup> On the anthropology of luminosity as the study of how variations of darkness and light affect human experience of space, thus interpersonal relationships, see Bille and Sorensen (2007).

## *The maquisards*

Men who go frequently to *maquis* are named '*maquisards*'.<sup>452</sup> As regular clients of *maquis*, *maquisards* know each other. They shape a kind of a night community bound by a common secret: the un-Islamic consumption of alcohol.<sup>453</sup> Apart from the consumption of alcohol, *maquisards* share another common point: their wealth.

Being a *maquisard* is being able to sustain an expensive lifestyle based on alcohol consumption in the *maquis*. Among the most popular alcoholic drinks in Mali, the big Castel beer (65cl) and the small plastic bag of 4cl of whisky cost respectively 900fcfa and 400fcfa in 2009 in Bougouni. Knowing that the daily wage of a builder was roughly 1000-1500fcfa, regular consumption of alcohol in *maquis* is not affordable for most Malians.<sup>454</sup>

Furthermore, the fact that alcohol is perceived as a vice has reinforced its consumption for inebriation rather than socialization. *Maquisards* rarely consume a single beer in an evening, but stay around the table in small groups, paying their round(s) of drinks, until they begin to feel drunk.

I once went alone in a *maquis*. I ordered a small Castel beer (35cl). I drank it and asked the barman for the bill. Looking choked he replied '*On vous a mal servi Monsieur?*' (We did not treat you well sir?). I just needed to refresh myself with one small beer before heading home. I narrated this anecdote to a *maquisard*. He laughed and commented: 'We in Mali do not go to *maquis* for just one beer. This is a waste of money! We drink several beers so as to be drunk!' It might be worth adding that *maquisards* do not start drinking by saying 'cheers' or '*santé*'. They just drink. Such small social rituals, indicating the presence of a culture of alcohol consumption in which drinking is not only about getting drunk but also about conviviality and warmth, do not exist in Mali. Drinking alcohol in groups around the same table includes an obvious social dimension; but more importantly, alcohol makes drinkers drunken.

When *maquisards* are about to go home, their bill can add up to thousands of francs. Sometimes, a *maquisard* invites friends and pays for all the drinks. Others drink in several *maquis* during the same evening. A *maquisard* who goes to *maquis* several times every week, by the end of the month will have spent more on alcohol than the entire budget of most

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<sup>452</sup> Women who go frequently to *maquis* are called '*maquisardes*'. They are much less numerous than *maquisards* and did not exist in Bougouni. In Mali, they are mostly found in the expensive *maquis* and night-clubs of Bamako. Similarly to what the anthropologist Thomas Fouquet observed in Dakar (2007), *maquisardes* in Bamako approached rich men and engaged them in complex relations of an economic, emotional and sexual natures (not perceived as prostitution) in order to get access to autonomy, emancipation and distinction.

<sup>453</sup> They are also known as such within their respective families as well. Their frequent absence during the night and the smell of alcohol betrayed them. Given that most of them are heads of family, their spouse(s) cover for them so as to preserve their honour (*danbé*). Their family keeps a low profile towards their consumption of alcohol as long as they are financially able to support them.

<sup>454</sup> Consumers of alcohol who cannot afford going to *maquis* buy local millet beer, palm wine and hydromel sold in the backyard of several shops. In 2010, one litre of palm wine cost roughly 200 fcfa in Bougouni.

Malian households. So, *maquisards* in Bougouni were heads of family who held important position within the local community, such as NGO workers, entrepreneurs, merchants, civil servants, politicians, policemen, doctors and agents of CMDT.<sup>455</sup> *Maquisards* are sometimes accompanied with what I call 'occasional *maquisards*': alcohol drinker who cannot afford the regular practice of alcohol consumption in *maquis*.

'If you want to know *mouvements* (plots) within the town, go to the big market, the mosques and the *maquis*' (Youssouf, student at the IFM of Bougouni).

Youssouf, like many other occasional *maquisards*, appreciated drunkenness from alcohol. However, he also valued *maquis* as platforms of contacts and businesses. For him, the *maquis* is among the three most important hubs of the town where information, plots and jobs are negotiated. Thanks to networking in *maquis*, he got acquainted with a local politician and participated as an activist in his campaign for *les élections communales maliennes* of *la Commune Urbaine* of Bougouni in April 2009. He gained a substantial amount of money in this job.

'In the *grin* we talk *des bobards* (fibs). In the *maquis* we speak seriously around the table' (Ibrahim, graduate and unemployed in Bougouni).

*Maquis* constitute a sort of hidden sphere where power, wealth and vice are juxtaposed in Mali.<sup>456</sup> As expressed by Ibrahim, *maquis* is no longer about the trivial matters discussed in *grins*, it is about discussing serious issues, meeting powerful actors and integrating networks of clientelism. Ibrahim continued by saying that while drinking alcohol and networking away from public scrutiny, people reveal themselves. Trust can develop. Business opportunities arise. Here, ideas and practices of business do not account for the common emphasis on Islamic identity as important criterion to the fashioning of trustful relations.<sup>457</sup> In this context business possibilities among *maquisards* emerge from an un-Islamic practice: the consumption of alcohol in *maquis*.<sup>458</sup> Focusing on trust as a relational concept rather than trust itself (see

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<sup>455</sup> *Compagnie Malienne de Développement du Textile*.

<sup>456</sup> In Bamako, when I passed *Le Komoguele* in the district of Magnabougou, taxi drivers used to comment 'this is the *maquis* of ATT!' (The former President of The Third Republic of Mali).

<sup>457</sup> On business based on religious allegiance in West Africa, compare the nineteenth and early twentieth century Muslim trade networks operated in the non-Muslim savannah of southern Mali and northern Ivory Coast (Amselle 1977; Launay 1992), the formation of Hausa trade networks of Tijaniyya allegiance in the 1950s and 1960s in the town of Ibadan (Cohen 1969, 141-161), and the networks of wahhabi traders in contemporary Sikasso (Warms 1992). Such links between business, trust and Islamic allegiance have been widely demonstrated beyond West Africa; for the example of a study of relationships between businessmen and Sufi saints in Lahore, see Ewing (1993).

<sup>458</sup> On trust based on asymmetric friendships (and not Islamic identity) in Bougouni, see chapter 4 (The economy charity).



Jiménez 2011),<sup>459</sup> the sharing of expensive alcoholic beverages in little groups in *maquis* away from public scrutiny becomes a 'pre-condition' of trust (Ibid, 192-193). Alcohol is a stigmatised substance in the local Muslim society whose consumption by Muslims has to be done secretly. In turn, the hidden consumption of illicit alcoholic beverages in *maquis* distinguishes their consumers from the others and allows them to think of themselves as an exclusive network through which business opportunities and trustful relations can be conceived and built discreetly in *maquis*. *Maquisards* form an influential network in Bougouni. Away from public scrutiny and around the table, they debate, chat, joke and exchange crucial information on the current state of affairs in town while drinking alcohol. Through the illicit consumption of alcohol, they build 'trust' (*danaya*) between themselves and do business together. Like Youssouf and Ibrahim, occasional *maquisards* look for economic opportunities through the patronage of influential *maquisards*.

'Why I continue to go to *maquis*? Patrons are in the *maquis*! Jobs are in the *maquis*!' (Ibrahim).

However, *maquis* as spaces of vice can be fatal for weak persons. It is not rare among *maquisards* to hear stories of men who became alcoholics and poured their family fortunes into *maquis*. Others took 'credit' (*juru*) to finance their binges and died consuming cheap adulterated alcohol of dubious origins (nicknamed '*poison*') sold in infamous *maquis*. Souleymane, a mechanical engineer who frequented the world of *maquis* for years, commented: 'You can drink. You can be drunk. However, you should not overdo it.'<sup>460</sup> A *maquisard*, even if he parties and consumes alcohol, should be able to handle his life and to fulfil his obligations as brother, father and head of family. The *maquis* is a space of vice, but it is not devoid of 'honour' (*danbé*). Any *maquisard* who is regularly too drunk and indulges in 'wild behaviour'<sup>461</sup> risks losing the trust of his peers and becoming an isolated alcoholic.

'The *maquis* can bring you many things, but you should learn to say "stop" to alcohol' (Souleymane, mechanical engineer in Bougouni).

In the Muslim society of Mali the consumption of alcohol is tolerated as long as it remains out of public scrutiny and it does not disturb public order. Owners of *maquis* are aware of the importance of the hidden character of their business. As consequence, it is difficult to know the exact number of *maquis* in a town. In Bougouni I surely did not discover all the *maquis* of

<sup>459</sup> '(...) the question today is not what trust is but what kind of work the notion does' (Jiménez 2011, 178-179).

<sup>460</sup> *Tu peux boire. Tu peux être bien pinté même. Mais tu ne dois pas exagérer.*

<sup>461</sup> *Comportement sauvage.*

the town, but I found more than 20 of them.<sup>462</sup> The demand for alcohol among Malian Muslims is obviously difficult to assess. What I observed is that *maquis* are lucrative and their number has tended to increase over the years. As a friend jokingly said ‘There are more *maquis* than mosques now in Bougouni!’

Although *maquis* and *maquisards* take advantage of the darkness of the night, night life is still bound to the metaphor of sight. From time to time, the success of a *maquis* slips into the street and the neighbourhood. Muslim community then denounces these nocturnal driftings and lobbies for the closure of the *maquis*.

In the next two sections, my aim is to describe two successful centres of night life in Bougouni and to analyse why and how one of the two lasted less than one year when the other has survived two decades there.

### ***The famous Alcatraz***

While booking a hotel in Bamako for my brothers who were coming to visit me in Mali, I exchanged a couple of words with its manager. I told him I was based in Bougouni. He replied ‘The famous *Alcatraz* is still there?’ I was surprised by his question. Usually nobody knows anything in particular about Bougouni apart from its bad reputation. I soon remembered what my friend Ali, a radio announcer in Bougouni, told me proudly about night life in his town: ‘We in Bougouni have *L’Alcatraz*, the unique nightclub of the entire south Mali!’ Ali was not entirely right because the towns of Sikasso and Koutiala, I heard, had night-clubs as well; however, *l’Alcatraz* is unique. On its dance floor, we could believe we were in the trendy night-club of a big African Capital. Through the shoulders of its bouncers, the show of its DJs, the class of its dancers and the sophistication of its decoration, its light show and its sound effects I felt I was somewhere in busy Bamako, rather than in small and slightly dull Bougouni.

*L’Alcatraz* is not only a nightclub of excellent standing: it consists of three cement buildings fenced by a high wall. The entire complex is dedicated to entertainment and hedonism. Each Saturday night around midnight trendy youth and better-off people in quest of fun and pleasure gathered there. As they said: ‘*Boiti be jama sɔɔ sufe!*’ (The night club will be packed tonight!) When I arrived at its parking lot on my modest Chinese bicycle, I always looked a bit out of place among the fine procession of motorbikes, Jakarta and cars which

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<sup>462</sup> Six hotels also sell alcohol in Bougouni, however at higher prices than *maquis*.

were washed clean and polished to a shine for this ostentatious occasion. In front of the entrance of *L'Alcatraz*, the crowd paraded while slowly entering into the complex. At *L'Alcatraz* the daytime restrictions on clothing styles were suspended. There elegance, charm, eroticism and creativity were the norm.

Men wore suits, shiny and colourful *boubous* made of rich brocades, elegant jeans and shirt or chic sport clothes. Certain men also displayed expensive mobiles, sunglasses, hats, caps and other fancy accessories. Dresses were carefully ironed and shoes polished. All that was '*griffé*'<sup>463</sup> (marked by famous brand) was displayed proudly. Moreover, Saturday was obviously a big day for hairdressers of the town.

However, what struck me most was the complete shift in the look of women between the day and the night. They abandoned their casual *pagne*, modest T-shirt and plastic sandals worn during the daytime and transformed themselves into what Fouquet coined a 'queen of the night' (2007, 115). Extravagant, embroidered *boubous* manufactured with finest brocades, low-cut skin-tight tops, bluejeans, lavish evening dresses, high-heel shoes, makeup, plaits, extensions, golden jewellery, perfume (...), all was permitted on Saturday night at *L'Alcatraz* as long as it combined eroticism with charm. Women were dressed in splendid and sexy manner, but rarely in ways Malians would label as '*vulgaire*' (vulgar) such as with visible y-string or thong and mini-skirt.<sup>464</sup> Most of them came there accompanied by their lover. *L'Alcatraz* was above all a place of ostentation, entertainment and fun.<sup>465</sup>

Although *L'Alcatraz* was known for its night-club, its clientele could choose among several options. Its complex was divided into three buildings. The night club stood in the middle building. As it was soundproofed, its noisy ambiance was inaudible from the outside. On the right on the ground floor of another building, people could sit, relax and eat savoury dishes and pastries in the quiet ambiance of the bakery-restaurant of *L'Alcatraz*. On the upper floor of the same building was the *maquis* of *L'Alcatraz*. There people could drink beer and stronger alcohol while chatting and debating together. Those who preferred drinking and flirting in a darker atmosphere could go to the back of the vast courtyard of the complex, where they sat around the tables found in the garden of *L'Alcatraz*. The multiple distractions found in this complex were one of the keys of its success. But more importantly, people took advantage of the fact that *L'Alcatraz* was only known as a nightclub.

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<sup>463</sup> The French adjective '*griffé*' refers to its name '*griffe*' which means signature in popular French. In this way, a famous brand is understood as signature that certifies the ostentatious character of a given item (Adidas, Gucci, Chanel ...).

<sup>464</sup> The queen of the night in Bougouni wore less daring dresses than the queen of the night of Dakar (see Fouquet 2007, 115).

<sup>465</sup> On ostentatious consumption generally in Bougouni, see chapter 5 (A successful life).

'*Maquis* and night-club are not the same. *L'Alcatraz* is the only true place of entertainment in Bougouni. We go dancing there. Well, some people seize the opportunity to go to the *maquis* upstairs' (Alou, graduate and unemployed in Bougouni).

Alou pointed to the fact that dancing and music are widely accepted entertainments in Mali; these distractions indeed typically accompany most public celebrations in Mali (wedding, baptism, end of Ramadan (...)). Going to the night-club on a Saturday night is not considered improper in itself. Many of the '*soirées dansantes*' organised in the night-club of *L'Alcatraz* on Saturday night were sponsored by the rich men and women of Bougouni or by local political parties. By renting the dance floor they became the '*parrain*' (godfather) and '*marraine*' (godmother) of the party. These events were announced by radio, and the sponsors were often namechecked by the DJs during the party. Sponsored parties can be understood in some respects as a continuation of traditional praise performances of *griots*.<sup>466</sup> During the evening, some people went back and forth between the night-club and the *maquis* and ended up drunk by the end of the party. Finally, couples in need of sex could complete their hedonistic journey in the hotel of *L'Alcatraz* which occupies the left hand building within the complex.

*L'Alcatraz* was erected in the years following the coup d'état of 1991; its owner is a local Malian who went on adventures to Italy and made a fortune there. He has continuously invested in *L'Alcatraz*, and another extension is currently under way. *L'Alcatraz* is the most successful place of distraction in Bougouni, with a wider renown. This success has lasted over two decades because of one crucial point: its strategic location. For good reasons *L'Alcatraz* was built outside the town and away from residential areas.

*L'Alcatraz* is located a kilometre down the exit towards Yanfolila on the right side of the tarred road. *L'Alcatraz* does not have direct neighbours. In front of it stand the school of IFM which is empty during the night. On its right stand the empty hangars of a former Swiss development project and the previous prison of Bougouni. On its left is nothing but trees and high grasses. The closest residential building to *L'Alcatraz* is the big colonial house of the *Préfet* of the *Cercle de Bougouni* standing at the top of the hill located behind *L'Alcatraz*. A large and thick forest separates them.

*L'Alcatraz* of Bougouni, echoing the *Alcatraz* Island of San Francisco Bay, is a remote institution from which it is difficult to escape; however, whereas prisoners were kept behind bars of the notorious federal prison of *Alcatraz* Island, clients of the famous *Alcatraz* of Bougouni give in to alcohol, dance and eroticism until the end of the night. Every weekend, *L'Alcatraz* transforms into a sort of lonely fortress of hedonism standing in the midst of the

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<sup>466</sup> On *griots*, see chapter 3 and 6.

night where trendy youth, better-off people and the local elite party ostentatiously away from the public scrutiny of residential areas.

### ***The rise and fall of Le Vatican***

Another place of Bougouni which became a centre of night life was called *Le Vatican*. As you will discover below, its success was rather ephemeral because it disturbed public order.

*Le Vatican* was located along the tarred road bordering the district of Heremakono. While still under construction, its original building attracted the curiosity of passers-by. A big house with thickly thatched roof, a brick wall to its rear, and an open-work wall made of white and blue planks of wood facing the street was taking shape. A large terrace was added in front of this kind of half-open house looking like a *paillote*.<sup>467</sup> When I met its promoter, a local Muslim who had lived most of his life in Bouaké but came back to Bougouni due to the Ivorian crisis, I asked him what his project here was.

‘Here in Bougouni there is no proper restaurant. They’ve mostly got petty restaurants where people eat off poor plastic plates and sit on worn benches and even on the ground! Me, I know how to welcome clients. You need to set a decent table with tablecloth, napkin and nice cutlery. You need to have comfortable seats with chair backs as well. You know, I just want to do the same as they rightly do in the restaurants of Côte d’Ivoire. You will see. I know my job.’

The promoter was as good as his word. When the construction work was completed, passers-by could admire a well-designed restaurant decorated with ‘*Le Vatican*’ in red characters painted on the front wall of the terrace. The promoter worked in a restaurant called *Le Vatican* in the town of Bouaké. Inspired by his former patron who named his restaurant in honour of the Vatican City, the promoter of *Le Vatican* in Bougouni chose a similar name so as to distinguish his restaurant from local restaurants by associated it with the ‘civilised’ restaurants of Côte d’Ivoire. He inaugurated his restaurant by organising a ‘*soirée dansante*’ at which he offered food and soft drinks to the population. His party was announced by radios, so masses of people came.

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<sup>467</sup> When I looked at this construction site, my first impression was: ‘This hut looks like a *paillote* found in the tourist areas of northern Mali! Unfortunately, there is not tourism in southwest Mali!’

However, after the crowd at the inauguration dispersed, his restaurant remained empty most of the time. The tables were delicately set and the food was well cooked and slightly exotic (westernised to some degree), but people still preferred to pay less by eating local dishes at petty restaurants. The promoter was also reluctant to sell alcohol to locals because he did not want his place to become a *maquis*.<sup>468</sup> My local friends were not surprised by the bad start made by *Le Vatican*. For them, there is no market for expensive restaurants in Bougouni because most of its inhabitants do not want to waste their already limited budget on what they see as useless distinction when they can eat their favourite meals at home. Bougouni is simply not Bamako. The promoter of *Le Vatican* chose the wrong town for such an elite business.

The poor business done by *Le Vatican* forced its promoter to sell it after only two months in business. According to gossip, the promoter took loans to build *Le Vatican*. Sensing the imminent failure of his business, he discreetly sold *Le Vatican* for a good price, and left Bougouni to elude his creditors. We never saw him again.

The two new owners had a totally different idea of what *Le Vatican* should be. One of their younger brothers became the manager of the new *Vatican*. Within two weeks, he had started selling beers and spirits. He also employed a local woman to cook affordable local snacks. *Le Vatican* stopped being a proper restaurant and became a sort of *maquis*. The clients came slowly.

A week later, *Le Vatican* started to rent *chambres de passe* as well. The manager found an empty house connected to the backyard of *Le Vatican* by a small hidden path which goes behind the residential house located on the left of *Le Vatican*. He investigated who was its landlord. He called him and they arranged a deal together. *Le Vatican* rented this empty house and turned it into five *chambres de passe*.

The transformation of *Le Vatican* did not end there. Shortly afterwards, a big Hi Fi system with speakers was installed in the restaurant. Two weeks later five Nigerian prostitutes<sup>469</sup> arrived at *Le Vatican* and settled into the *chambres de passe*. Within five weeks *Le Vatican* has been transformed into a *maquis* with *chambres de passe* and a brothel. When seeing the prostitutes, members of a *grin*<sup>470</sup> facing *Le Vatican* exclaimed: 'Ouh, this is really a *maquis* now!' From the very moment the prostitutes came, *Le Vatican* started to be a hit, and became crowded every night. Ironically, *Le Vatican* turned into a space of vice rather than a

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<sup>468</sup> He sold alcohol only to foreigners such as passing South African engineers working in gold mines found in south Mali, and myself.

<sup>469</sup> I suspected these Nigerian women were forced into prostitutions by traffickers who set a network of "Nigerian" brothels in most gold mining sites and towns of south Mali. Such brothels are connected to the broader political economy of prostitution in West Africa.

<sup>470</sup> *Le Vatican* was located in front of a night *grin* I regularly visited in the other side of the tarred road.

‘civilised’ restaurant worthy of the morality of Vatican City. The prostitution and the renting of *chambres de passe* were accelerating and beer was frequently out of stock. During the holy month of Ramadan activities slowed down, but the crowd was still there.

The *shefantigi* and the owner of the small restaurant located just next to *Le Vatican* were practising Muslims and fasted during the day, yet they were happy when the night fall because the clients of *Le Vatican* consumed their food. Business was prospering.

‘As an Ivorian song says “one man’s meat is another man’s poison” (Yaya, *shefantigi* in Bougouni).’

Yaya agreed alcohol and prostitution are bad; however, these illicit activities brought him many clients. Thanks to *Le Vatican*, his daily turnover multiplied by four! He continued: ‘What can I do? I accept them. I need to survive here.’

However the success of *Le Vatican* quickly started to drift to the street. Initially, the prostitutes stayed within the *paillote*. After a couple of weeks, they started to come out; they sat on the terrace and ordered food next door as well. The comings and goings of clients also produced noise within the neighbourhood of *Le Vatican*. Furthermore, access to *chambres de passe* had a weak point: a neighbouring family complained about ‘*tapage nocturne*’ (nocturnal nuisance) of prostitutes and their clients who had to pass near the courtyard of their residential house in order to enter the *chambres de passe*. Given that this courtyard did not have a concrete door; families could see prostitutes and clients passing by from within their *carré*. As *Le Vatican* was close to the street lighting of the tarred road, it also attracted the gaze of passers-by during the night.

Three weeks after the end of the Ramadan, I heard in town that ‘*Le Vatican* has fallen!’ (*Le Vatican binna*) The neighbours called the landlord of the house turned into *chambres de passe*. They warned him about what was going on there. He then travelled from Sikasso and gave the manager two days notice to leave his house. Meanwhile, a wall of bricks was erected across the small path connecting the backyard of *Le Vatican* to the former *chambres de passe*. As soon as the *chambres de passe* were closed and the prostitutes left *Le Vatican*, the clients abandoned the place. Soon, its owners removed valuable materials from *Le Vatican*. So far the *paillote* has remained. Yaya the *shefantigi*, discouraged by the lack clients, left the area as well.

In the previous paragraph, by neighbours I do not necessarily mean those who openly complained to the manager about the passing of prostitutes and their clients near their courtyard. One of the inhabitants of this residential *carré* ran a business which benefited from clients brought by *Le Vatican*. The so-called ‘Wahhabis’ were also spotted scrutinising *Le*

*Vatican* from the tarred road after the night prayers of Ramadan. The closest mosque to *Le Vatican* was the main mosque where Muslims of reformist allegiance prayed. Nobody knew exactly who put pressure on the landlord of the house turned into *chambres de passe*. It could be someone people did not expect to do so. Any script remains possible. One thing is however sure. The landlord was approached secretly. In my view, this was done purposefully. Suspicions about responsibility might be entertained, but the conflict could not become open because the informers' identities remained uncertain. The landlord might have publicly kept quiet the fact that he knew what was really going on there. As long as the *chambres de passe* did not disturb public order, he was gaining money, and his big cement house was costly, and had been empty for months after the departure of his last tenant, an NGO project. Any client wanting to rent the house would, I imagine, have been welcome. Once these *chambres de passe* started disturbing public order, the landlord (living in Sikasso) could protect himself by saying 'I had no clue about what was going on there.' The deal arranged between the owners of *Le Vatican* and the landlord of their *chambres de passe* might have integrated this risk. Secret deals and hypocrisy are important parts of setting up un-Islamic businesses.

Members of the *grin* facing *Le Vatican* observed its rise and its fall. It lasted 5 months in total; 2 months as a restaurant and 3 months as a *maquis*-brothel.<sup>471</sup> Now they debated the reasons for its short-lived existence. For them, *Le Vatican* was doomed to failure because it was not sufficiently hidden from public scrutiny. They said we should not forget that Mali is a Muslim country. Such un-Islamic activities endure only if they are kept secret; that is out of sight. *Le Vatican* was an open space which was not enclosed by a wall. The street lighting on the tarred road illuminated (although dimly) illicit activities within *Le Vatican*: prostitution and the consumption of alcohol. More significantly, when they compared *Le Vatican* to other longstanding *maquis* and brothels in town those in the *grin* observed '*Le Vatican* did not have a back-door'. They supported their opinion by referring to the brothel *Chez David* which benefits from a small back-door overlooking a dark inner street of Bougouni. Its main entrance next to street lighting was not used during the night. Most of the clients of *Chez David* opted for an unnoticed arrival through its discreet back-door instead.

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<sup>471</sup> To be more precise, *Le Vatican* sold alcohol for three months; it hosted prostitutes for two months.



## ***Reflections on Islam and public order in Mali and beyond***

The anthropology of the night I have pursued is interested above all in the night as darkness that hides. This analysis of night life is complete only when thought about in relation to day life; whereas daylight controls and regulates activities, darkness of the night covers and enlarges life.<sup>472</sup>

As illustrated in previous chapters, daytime in Mali concerns chores and work (*baara*), street life, the open and its visual dimension ('thereness'). The everyday life of Muslims is mainly framed by a gendered division of work, spaces of sociality (*carré*, *grin* and street), visits, and life-cycle ceremonies. Social life is about togetherness and ostentation. Muslims display public norms of piety and practise 'generic Islam'; both assert Muslim identity and shape what I have called 'public Islam' by connoting pious disposition. By respecting elders, customs (*laada*) and Mande social ethics (*hadamadenya*), Muslims show politeness, good manners and cultivate honour (*danbé*). By seeking ostentatious items (mobiles, motorbikes, cemented house) Muslims align with success in life based on materiality and consumption. All these examples demonstrate that the metaphor of sight is an important aspect of identity, success and social control in the Muslim society of Mali.

Night time in Mali concerns free-time (*lafyia*), the concealed and its intimate dimension ('hereness'). Every-night life is mainly framed by secrecy, remoteness and nocturnal escapade (*yaala*). Away from public scrutiny some Muslims relax and seek pleasure (dance, alcohol and sex) in *maquis* and night-clubs while networking among the patrons. During the night electricity becomes an ambivalent 'civilising' force. Electricity keeps agents of *Bamanaya* at bay, but it also promotes night life and all its un-Islamic activities in town. In this way Islam and electricity do not promote the same civilised life. Then how can we understand Islam as a civilising force of urban Mali? Whereas Islam is an important element of public order during daytime in contemporary Mali, electricity allows a modernity of un-Islamic nature to flourish during the night.

Although most inhabitants of Bougouni declare publicly they are Muslim, the Islamisation of the society as the framework of life is at stake here. Recently, high schools in Bougouni inserted slots for Islamic prayers into their timetable. Should we consider this new policy as matter of good sense or as an Islamisation of high school? In this case, I opt for the former, because most students are Muslims, and regular daily prayers belong to basic Islamic practice and identity. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2 'generic Islam' has become an important

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<sup>472</sup> On similar day/night approach to life among young women in Dakar, see Fouquet (2007, 117).

element of public order in Mali where Muslims represent over 90% of the Malian population. Through post 1991 democratic and liberal changes, Muslims gained the right to be politically active in Mali. As such Muslims and Muslim associations participate in the construction of Malian civil society.

However, post-1991 events have also pointed to the fact that Malian *laïcité* has been questioned by a minority of Muslims. For instance, on the night of the 26 September 2011 the bar-hotel and night-club *Le Flamboyant* in the district of Kalabancoura-Sud in Bamako was destroyed by a group of followers of a neighbouring mosque. According to Malian websites,<sup>473</sup> followers of a neighbouring mosque complained about the noise nuisance of *Le Flamboyant*. They took the owner of *Le Flamboyant* to court. *Le Flamboyant* had, however, legal approval and was built before the mosque. Therefore a group of Muslims decided to dispense justice themselves. The assailants, armed with stones and clubs, burst into the bar-hotel at 4 am. They hit the employees, sacked and burnt the hotel and a car. Then they fled. Six persons were injured, one seriously. Many Malian newspapers, such as *Les Echos*, denounced this ‘*acte de vandalisme*’. The same newspaper mentioned that ‘under the threat of “religious” people’ two other bars decided to close in this same area.<sup>474</sup>

This is not the first time a bar has been vandalised by religious activists who decide to take justice into their own hands in Mali; but such vandalism on behalf of Islam remains comparatively rare in Mali, a country where most ordinary Muslims support the *laïcité* of the state. However attacks of spaces of alcohol consumption have increased since 1991. Under the military dictatorship of Moussa Traoré, bars and night-clubs had to close during the holy month of Ramadan. Shortly after the events of 1991 this decree was cancelled; the Malian state reinforced its secular character by allowing the opening of bars and night-clubs during the Ramadan. This new policy was perceived as a provocation by a minority of Muslims. They demonstrated in vain. With the post-1991 development of tourism in Mali, bars, hotels, restaurants selling alcohol and night-clubs have multiplied in Bamako. The Malian state supported this niche market through the OMATO (*Office Malien du Tourisme et de l’Hôtellerie*). Malian, Lebanese, French and Chinese (among others) promoters invested in the lucrative entertainment business in Bamako. As a consequence, night life has started to drift into the streets of the capital. The rampage at *Le Flamboyant* illustrates the growing discontent of

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<sup>473</sup> <http://www.afribone.com/spip.php?article36322>; <http://www.lesechos.ml/acte-de-vandalisme-l%E2%80%99hotel-le-flamboyant-saccage-par-des-integristes.html>; <http://www.bamanet.net/index.php/actualite/autres-presses/15769-lhotel-le-nid-du-flamboyant-saccage-par-des-musulmans--5-blesses-graves-une-mercedes-190-calcinée-et-dimportants-degats-matériels.html> (retrieved the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2011).

<sup>474</sup> My own translation, see <http://www.lesechos.ml/acte-de-vandalisme-l%E2%80%99hotel-le-flamboyant-saccage-par-des-integristes.html>.

Muslims of reformist allegiance who feel provoked by the increasing visibility of alcohol consumption and sexy clothes in Mali since 1991.<sup>475</sup>

Shortly before the end of my stay in Bougouni, I heard a new night-club called '*Le Faro*'<sup>476</sup> was under construction next to the exit toward Yanfolila. The youth were excited about this new project which might offer an alternative to the classic Saturday night out at *L'Alcatraz*. Its promoter, a French man married to a woman from Yanfolila, wanted to build a tourism complex to include a hotel, a restaurant, a swimming pool and a night-club. However, half-way through its construction the project was compelled to stop. After having issued the promoter with all necessary legal approvals, the same local authorities changed their mind when Muslims of a neighbourhood mosque<sup>477</sup> started to complain about the erection of a bar-hotel and night club next to their mosque. For them, the un-Islamic activities brought by this new entertainment complex would perturb prayers in the mosque and go against its morality. Others commented that the local authorities hurried to cash a costly building permit without bothering first to consult with the closest neighbours of this estate project: the Muslims of a mosque located just across the tarred road. According to latest news, the promoter abandoned his plans for a tourism complex and built a residential house instead. I doubt he recovered any money from the local authorities.

Whereas the abortion of '*Le Faro*' tourism complex in Bougouni illustrates the greed of local authorities which caused them to act inconsistently, the fire attack on *Le Flamboyant* in Bamako questions the existence of the street as space of freedom. By 'clearing' the streets, such radical Muslims claim to fight against un-Islamic practices. However, bars and night-clubs do not disappear; they just go underground. They simply 'take the *maquis*'. In relation to the issue of the street as space of freedom, both cases highlight 'the problem of sameness' (see Kelly and Thiranagama 2010, 9) facing a country in which public order is increasingly being understood in religious terms. This tendency is partially caused by the fact that local authorities have failed to act as reliable agents of public order in the money-making market of legal approval that has come with the rapid urbanisation of Mali.

In some parts of the Muslim world, there is a process of homogenisation of street expression and identity working in parallel with the setting up of spaces of exception such as the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in Saudia Arabia. In contrast to what is happening in Saudia Arabia, women are allowed to drive within the campus and are

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<sup>475</sup> In the aftermath of the rampage of *Le Flamboyant* the Malian state has invited members of civil society, local state, OMATO, police as well as representatives of HCl (*Haut Conseil Islamique*) to check together legal approvals of bars, clubs and hotels of Bamako (see, <http://www.rue89.com/2011/07/03/au-mali-des-islamistes-font-la-tournee-des-bars-212027>, retrieved the 11 June 2012).

<sup>476</sup> '*Faro*', from the French word '*faraud*', is a colloquial term which signifies 'show-off'.

<sup>477</sup> A reformist-oriented mosque built by AMA (*Agence des Musulmans d'Afrique*; a Kuwaiti financed Islamic NGO).

not required to wear veils in classes that are open to both sexes. These spaces of exception are like zones of non-Islam where apparently God closes his eyes. Similarly, when we look at the diffusion of bars and night-clubs in the capital Bamako, they mostly concentrate in *Rue Princesse* in Hippodrome district, around the *Bla-Bla* night-club in Badalabougou district and around the *Byblos* night-club which is located along the *Route de Koulikoro*. In these three locations, bars and night-clubs shape sort of zones of non-Islam where members of the Malian upper-class, '*expatrié(e)s*' (foreign workers) and western tourists drink alcohol, dance and party freely away of residential areas and mosques . The hypocrisy of such zones of non-Islam should not been treated as a 'pathology or a distortion of political life' but as a means through which lucrative un-Islamic businesses are domesticated in predominantly Muslim societies (see Kelly and Thiranagama 2010, 2). Most other bars of Mali are *maquis*; they have been able to endure in the predominantly Muslim society of Mali because of their hidden and discreet insertion into urban landscapes.

## Conclusion

My thesis has highlighted the ways the events of March 1991 put Mali on the path of a new era of liberal and democratic changes. The Third Republic provided the background to the urban street life that has been a key to the interpretation of Muslim life that I have based on my 18 months of fieldwork in the town of Bougouni in southwest Mali. As I reached the completion of writing this thesis, however, the country entered a crisis that has jeopardised the institutions of the Third Republic, disrupted its democratic process,<sup>478</sup> and slowed both its local economy and the importation of foreign products into the country. In the aftermath of the conquest of northern Mali by the *Mouvement National de libération de l'Azawad* (MLNA) allied with several 'Islamist' insurgent factions, the Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré was overthrown by a coup d'état on 22 March 2012. After a three week power contest between the military junta led by Captain Sanogo and the International Community (particularly the ECOWAS), Dioncounda Traoré (the head of Mali's national assembly) became the interim President of Mali. But in August 2012, while I write this conclusion, the political situation in Mali remains highly confused. The country is still cut in two:<sup>479</sup> whereas the north is in the hands of several armed factions motivated by heterogeneous and obscure aims, the Malian state remains paralysed because its executive authority has suffered from a lack of legitimacy since the coup d'état. In addition to exacerbating longstanding economic scarcity, how has this period of instability impacted on people's lives, their general aspiration to be successful, moral Muslim in southern Mali? Although I have not yet been able to return to Mali since these events occurred, a partial response to these complex and emergent issues can be provided by the messages telling me what has become of my main informants since I left the country in April 2010.

Salif, a former student in the Qur'anic school in Segou, and later a farmer in southern rural Mali, left his village to settle in town where he learnt the profession of tailor in order to gain the money necessary to become independent and finance his wedding. After years of unsuccessful struggle in Bougouni, however, he became progressively disheartened. When a recent attempt to make money in a gardening project organised by an NGO failed, Salif took an important decision. Still single and without savings, he eventually yielded to what he had attempted to avoid since moving to Bougouni: an outdated rural way of life closely associated with the authority of elders. Shortly after my departure, Salif settled back in his village of origin

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<sup>478</sup> The first round of the presidential election planned for 29 April 2012 was cancelled.

<sup>479</sup> More than 100,000 civilians have fled northern Mali since its invasion. Most of them have taken refuge in southern Mali and in neighbouring countries, such as Niger and Burkina Faso. Those who stayed have had to cope with many kinds of shortages and a *sharia*-oriented rule imposed by 'Islamist' factions.

next to his *gwa*.<sup>480</sup> The head of the family, his big brother, found him a bride. Thanks to his cattle trade, he financed Salif's wedding, and give him money so as to settle his household. Salif became a married man; however, he henceforth had to accept his position as an adult whose life-trajectory was closely bound to the power of his elders who had helped him to achieve this status. Besides farming activities, he still earns some extra cash by repairing villagers' clothes thanks to the tailoring skills he learnt in town.

Kassim, a former docker in San Pedro harbour who fled the Ivorian crisis to Mali, thereafter became gardener in Sikasso, houseboy, mill worker and *shefantigi* in Bougouni; near the end of my stay in southwest Mali, he was running a cement-built shop selling and servicing mobile phones. At that time, his financial situation was improving, so plans for a wedding and the purchase of prestigious products, and the prospect of an honourable return to his relatives in Côte d'Ivoire, preoccupied him. A couple of months later, however, I heard that Kassim had left the town following an unfortunate event: he had entrusted his neighbour with a considerable amount of money so as to conclude an important business deal, but the neighbour betrayed their friendship by spending most of this money instead on his personal needs. The irreparable financial loss seriously undermined the working capital of Kassim's shop. According to a recent call I had with Yaya, Kassim's former patron, in the aftermath of this interpersonal and economic blow Kassim moved on to the town of Yanfolila. There he opened a small shop '*par terre*' where he fixed mobile phones as a livelihood.

Boubacar, a trader of *yuguyugu* from a village near Segou who worked in the central market of Bougouni, was also hit by a misfortune. One day, the local police arrested him and put him in jail with other small traders of Bougouni; they were all accused of selling stolen *yuguyugu*. After taking credits so as to pay a bail of 100,000fcfa for his release, Boubacar and his family left Bougouni to Segou because, frightened, he did not want to pay more for something he thought that he was wrongly accused of. According to local gossip, the chief of the police, an old man from the *Région* of Koulikoro, had abused of his power by making false accusations against tens of small, hence, powerless traders so as to make easy extra cash in preparation for his coming retirement. Boubacar, a man who harboured suspicions about the 'bad persons' of Bougouni, was himself eventually caught up in the notorious reputation of the town.

Fousseini, a fisherman from a village near Segou, had undergone months of poor fishing by the end of my stay in Bougouni. He explained that his lack of *garijege* (luck)<sup>481</sup> caused there to be so few fish in his daily catch. Despite the intervention of a *marabout* and his

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<sup>480</sup> On *gwa*, see Chapter 1 and 5.

<sup>481</sup> For more about the *Bamanan* notion of luck, see Chapter 3.

regular utterance of blessings, his luck did not improve. When fishing in the River Ba near to Bougouni was no longer sufficiently profitable to provide a decent livelihood for his wife, his daughter and himself, he abandoned fishing and retrained as a carter in the centre of Bougouni. He hoped this situation would not persist, because the job of carter is physically demanding and poorly paid. Six months after my departure, Fousseini and his family moved to the little town of Selingue in southwest Mali, soon after he heard from a friend living there that fishing in the Selingue Lake was good. By the beginning of 2012, he had decided to work as a digger<sup>482</sup> in a traditional gold washing site in Guinea, while his family stayed in Selingue. As he told me: 'I would like to chance it with gold'. In July when I called him, he was preparing for the arrival of his family to live with him.

Apart from Yaya, a powerful state administrator whose situation has flourished in Bougouni, and Ahmed, a farmer and *bogolan* maker involved in many local activities, all my friends have left Bougouni so as to pursue their adventures elsewhere because they did not find success they craved in this town. Bougouni, like most middle-sized towns in West Africa, is a crossroads for migrants in search of a better life. A tiny minority of them achieve some success in town, while most of them struggle to make ends meet. Given the longstanding context of hardship and social stagnation, the recent coup d'état has not constituted a major shift in their lives (as the conquest of northern Mali by various armed factions must have been for Malians living in north Mali); so far, they have perceived this event as one more of the political vagaries affecting the capitals of West Africa. As the head of my host family told me over the phone: 'The town of Bougouni is quiet. Nothing has changed here. We just listened to the radio that the situation is tense in the capital.'

Two elements will be decisive for the final effect of the coup on lives in Mali: the length of the period of instability, and the outcome for the sovereignty of Mali over its northern territories. As yet, it is too soon to assess whether the coup d'état of 22 March 2012 in Mali marks the beginning of a new era in this country, as the coup d'état of 26 March 1991 did. Nonetheless, I would like to comment upon an element of the current Malian crisis which has struck western media in general. Whereas the conquest of northern Mali has been interpreted as a side effect of the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, many observers did not foresee the possibility of a coup d'état in a country commonly seen as a model of democracy in Africa. The fact that many Malians have accepted the coup d'état and tolerated the military junta, such as the youths who, through demonstrations in the streets of Bamako, opposed foreign intrusion in Malian politics by questioning the legitimacy of the interim President of Mali,

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<sup>482</sup> On the job of digger, see Chapter 6.

illustrate the failure of post-1991 governments to work for ordinary Malians in general; ‘indeed, in recent years, we have witnessed a transformation of the Malian economy to the benefit of foreign capital and private interests, but ultimately to the detriment of Malian peasants and workers’ (County and Peterson 2012, 2). In similar vein, Chapter 5 demonstrates that, whereas access to a modern urban way of life remains the exclusive preserve of a tiny minority of urbanites who are becoming richer (among them numerous big traders, politicians and state senior officers), migrants of rural origins make do with cheap Asian products, while others simply struggle to make a meagre livelihood in town. In this context of simmering if submerged discontent, in its immediate aftermath a coup d’état is more likely to be interpreted in terms of a hope for new opportunities than an attack on democratic institutions deserving of defence. In their quest for worldly success, Muslim believers I met in Bougouni, with whom I have communicated in 2012, interpret this period of instability as a collective *sababu* (cause)<sup>483</sup> affecting Malian society, and most particularly its northern territories. On a personal level, whether a Malian perceives this *sababu* as *juguman* (bad), or *numan* (good) remains relative,<sup>484</sup> because, as Kassim told me when he ran a successful *shefantigi* next to the maquis-brothel *Le Vatican*; ‘one man’s meat is another man’s poison’.

The political and economic stability of Mali has largely depended on two factors since its independence: the resolution of the instability of the north of Mali (particularly the Tuareg rebellions), and the opening up of Mali to neighbouring forest zone and coastal countries. The first factor has been headline news of scientific and media analyses, but the second remains understudied. A first step in this direction would explore how the recent changes affect the dynamics of the border zone between the Malian town of Bougouni, the Ivorian town of Odienné, and the Guinean town of Kankan. The current crisis has accelerated the general southward migration observed within Mali ever since droughts hit northern Mali during the 1980s. The vast savannah of southern Mali, which had already become an important zone of immigration due to the increasing demographic pressure and desiccation affecting northern Mali (by contrast with the relative availability of land resources in southern Mali) is progressively transforming into a regional hub where people migrate so as to avoid conflict and to gain access to a better life; in parallel, traders and smugglers increase their operations there in order to adapt their businesses to changed economic flows. The instability in northern Mali coupled with the relative stabilisations of Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea will boost the strategic importance of the formerly marginal savannah zone between Mali, Côte d’Ivoire, and Guinea,

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<sup>483</sup> On the *Bamanan* notion of *sababu*, see Chapter 4.

<sup>484</sup> On *sababu juguman* and *sababu numan*, see Chapter 4.



and the cross-boundary activities there, a mutation that will have considerable impact in our understanding of the Sahel-Savannah-Coastal dynamics and their regulations.

My doctoral thesis has been the first monograph-length work to describe and analyse contemporary Muslim life in southern Mali. The next logical step would involve an exploration of the vast savannah and border zone extending across Mali, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire in order to study religious experiences and identity formation that involved cross-boundary exchanges, belongings and dynamics.

## Appendix 1

### *Buguni*

*Jamana ka di Banimonité Jamana (four times).*

*Buguni ka di Banimonotié, Buguni i fo. Buguni ka di Banimonotié, Buguni.*

*Mɔɔ tɔɔ jugu ma na fo i tɔɔ numan yé, numan tɛ don tugu, numan tɛ don tugu.*

*Mun bɛ Buguni? Balimaya bɛ Buguni de.*

*Mun bɛ Buguni ? Jigin dugu bɛ Buguni.*

*Mun bɛ Buguni ? Dunan bonya bɛ Buguni de (twice).*

*Mun bɛ Buguni ? Jigin dugu bɛ Buguni.*

*Mun bɛ Buguni ? Hine ani makari bɛ.*

*Mɔɔ tɔɔ jugu ma na fo i tɔɔ numan yé, numan tɛ don tugu, numan tɛ don tugu.*

*Mun bɛ Buguni? Furu bonya bɛ Buguni de.*

*Mun bɛ Buguni ? Furu dilan bɛ Buguni.*

*Nɛ bɛ i wele fila Buguniden u ma, an ka jɛ ka an bolo di ɲɔɲɔn an ma, an ka jɛ ka baara kɛ Buguni.*

*Buguni ka di Banimonité, Buguni i fo, dugu dasiri i fo, dugu dasiri i fo.*

*Kulubali siw ani waati Buguni kola.*

*Tu kɔɔni ma mudu jaba nɛnɛ*

*Mɔɔ bina kulu kan, kulu bɛ i ma jogin; ni kulu bina mɔɔ kan, kulu bɛ i ma jogin.*

*Fula numan tatati.*

*Fula si naani jatara si naani.*

*Fula ma na bonya fulaya cenna; ko fula ma na fasa fulaya dafara.*

*Ko Banimonitié fulaw olu yé barika dunan ni jatigiya la.*

*Dow u ko ko a kɛra Buguni «examen» yé, dow u ko ko a kɛra Buguni «examen» yé. Dow u ko ko Buguni fatɔ ka ca.*

*Fatɔ ma ca Buguni, Buguni yé kunbeyɛ yé.*

*Ni ɛ bɛ Buguni jini, Buguni bɛ min ni. A sigilen bɛ Côte d'Ivoire ani Mali dance la. A sigilen bɛ la Guinée ani Mali dance la. A sigilen bɛ Sikasso ni Bamako cɛ.*

*Dugu dasiri fo, Dugu dasiri fo : Buguni ka di Banimonité, Buguni (twice).*

## Appendix 2

ANÇAR DINE INTERNATIONALE  
ADI

Bancoué Djanguinéhougou  
Rue 686 Porte 61 B.P. : 752 Cell (00223) 20 72 64 94

E-Mail : [ancardineinter@yahoo.fr](mailto:ancardineinter@yahoo.fr)

Site Web : [www.ancardineinterdara.com](http://www.ancardineinterdara.com)



# PROGRAMME MAOULOU 2010

Dates	Périodes	Activités
Mercredi 24 - 02 - 10	Nuit	Accueil des pèlerins - lecture de programme - Animation
Jeudi 25 - 02 - 10	Matin	Mise en place au Stade Modibo KEÏTA
	Soir	Transport des pèlerins au Stade Modibo KEÏTA
	Nuit	Prêche de la naissance du prophète Mohamed (SBL)
Vendredi 26 - 02 - 10	Matin	Pause
	Soir	Théâtre
	Nuit	Animation (Zikri)
Samedi 27 - 02 - 10	Matin	Salutation de toutes les délégations maliennes
	Soir	
	Nuit	Conférence de la commission de santé
Dimanche 28 - 02 - 10	Matin	Questions - Réponses
	Soir	Divertissement des enfants (Karaté)
	Nuit	Lecture du coran (Bénédictio des Ançar pour le Guide et sa famille)
Lundi 01 - 03 - 10	Matin	Rencontre du Guide avec le Woudou
	Soir	Conférence Nationale du Mali
	Nuit	Prêche sur la descendance du Prophète (le Guide Spirituel)
Mardi 02 - 03 - 10	Matin	Conférence Internationale
	Soir	Assemblée Internationale des femmes
	Nuit	Animation (Zikri)
Mercredi 03 - 03 - 10	Matin	Assainissement et mise en place du Stade
	Soir	Transport des pèlerins
	Nuit	Prêche du Baptême
Jeudi 04 - 03 - 10	Matin	Mise en place au Stade
	Soir	Bénédictio du Maouloud (Douwawou)
Vendredi 05 - 03 - 10		Départ des délégations

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